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**‘All bundled together in endless
confusion’: Museums, Collecting and
Material Practices in Late-Victorian
Culture.**

by

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies.**

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Cuming Museum inventory number PS02355.

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work. No part of it has been submitted for a degree at another university. No part of it has been published elsewhere.

Abstract

This thesis examines how collecting was constructed through print culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It suggests that private collecting deviated from the modes of selection, arrangement and display which an increasingly professionalised museum culture employed to render their collections 'useful'; that is, to make and transmit meaning. It argues that when private collections strayed from these ideal conditions, they threatened rational methods and structures through which meaning was made, and so were derided and marginalised in Victorian literature and culture. From literature's frequent depictions of maniacal collectors, and through an examination of the collections held at the Cuming Museum, London, I develop two lines of inquiry into the borders between useful collecting and mad accumulation.

The first part, 'too close', interrogates the collector's touch, and asks what was at stake when objects were apprehended without the glass cabinets and velvet ropes of nineteenth-century museum displays. It sets out how the museum's restriction of the tactile sense played a part in the transmission of linear, positivist narratives, and explores touch's potential for inaugurating an affective relationship between people and things. It uses relics, which were prized in private collections and suppressed in museums, as a prism through which to examine Victorian attitudes toward corporeal knowledge. It also examines the relationship of these contexts to Victorian literature through a sustained analysis of the works of the nineteenth century's most prolific writer of collectors, Henry James.

The second section, 'too much', probes the problems with superabundance in nineteenth-century collections. It interrogates three loci around which Victorian anxieties about excess were concentrated: the miser, the domestic interior and the lumber room. Examining the ways that textual productions helped to shape the meanings of excess in these contexts, it shows that cultural injunctions against copious collections stemmed from a fear that they exposed systems of creating meaning to irrationality. By investigating the ways in which nineteenth-century print culture, including fictions by Charles Dickens, Vernon Lee, and other writers in the periodical press defined the conceptual boundaries of collecting, this thesis interrogates the idea of 'the collection' itself, and highlights practices and practitioners that have not historically laid claim to that label. It argues that what is at stake in the definition of legitimate, useful collecting is access to the means of making knowledge itself.

Introduction

The Walworth Emporium of Nicknacks is a mess. The glass that would contain its contents is in pieces, and the things in the shop threaten to overrun it. They are anarchically and joyfully disordered, not exhibited or systematized but 'all bundled together in endless confusion'.¹ To step into the shop is to step back in time, for the space remains 'much as it was at the early part of the last Century'. This eerie stasis envelops not only the shop's aesthetic and character, but also the objects inside, which are old themselves, and 'mantled with venerable dust & dirt.' The shop bears further markers of age; the 'three well-worn steps' which one descends to enter are joined by 'rickety cabinets' and 'show-cases with smashed glazing', all stuffed to the brim with a seemingly endless parade of 'antique Pottery, Glass & China, old Wood Casings, South Sea Necklaces, Fish-hooks, Boxes, & decorated Gourds, Stuffed Birds, Fish & Reptiles, Eggs, Insects, Shells, Minerals, Seed Vessels, & Fossil & recent Bones, quaint contrivances in Bottles, Pipe-bowls, Cut Paper-work, Small Paintings & Prints, & a host of other matters'. This chaotic melee of unlabelled objects, with their various obscure histories and origins, are stuffed together into 'the dark and dingy shop', the windows 'crowded from bottom to top with curious objects of all sorts & sizes'. The shop's contents, which tumble asyndetically from the cabinet and onto the page, conform to no discernible system of classification or display.

This account of South London's Walworth Emporium is taken from a short unpublished manuscript composed in the second half of the nineteenth century.² The shop's multifariousness almost defies description; a lengthy list of the wall adornments in an upper room, including 'pictures, Arms, Paddles, Horns & Antlers, Carvings, Metal work,

¹ Henry Syer Cuming, 'Our Old Curiosity Shop', [n.d.] London, Southwark Local History Library, MS TN05693. The following quotations are all taken from this unpaginated manuscript.

² The manuscript is undated, although references in the text to the death of the shop's proprietor in 1865 put its creation after that year.

Fans & bits of Savage & Oriental Costume' gives way to the admission that 'in fact it would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the motley gathering.' This cluttered confusion of heterogeneous objects is clearly a source of great delight for the author, whose description of the 'once-famous Emporium of Nicknacks and Bric-a-Bracs' is inspired by Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* - if Dickens can make poetry of such a den, he asks, then 'why should not our Old Curiosity Shop be immortalized'? The Walworth Emporium is much like Nell's Grandfather's shop, 'one of those receptacles for old and curious things which seem to crouch in odd corners of this town and to hide their musty treasures from the public eye in jealousy and distrust.'³ Dickens paints his shop as a haven for unwilling commodities which, through their abundance, obscure each other from potential purchasers. Similarly, the Walworth Emporium rejects the desire-inducing display of the new nineteenth-century department stores in favour of what Stephen Bann calls the 'subversive attraction' of confusion and disorder.⁴ The Emporium does not thrust its objects into the marketplace but conceals them from it; although the author is clearly a frequent visitor to the Walworth shop, no purchases are made mention of, nor other customers described. In fact, the only time its objects change hands in this narrative is after the proprietor's death, when 'within a Week or two after his decease the Old Stock was removed to Steven's Sale-Rooms & there dispersed & the Family quitted their natal home.' Similarly, the shop of Dickens' novel only witnesses its things' movement *en masse*, when Quilp sells them as payment for Grandfather's gambling debts. Both shops are ostensibly centres of commerce, but through their aspect of abandonment, are more akin to resting-places than marketplaces, as the objects they contain gather the dust and dirt of ages. Although always, potentially, bearers of exchange value, through their stubborn

³ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. by Angus Easson (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 47.

⁴ On the 'elaborate fantasies of consumption' inspired by the displays in the glass windows of department stores, see Andrew H. Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On disorder, see Stephen Bann, 'The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display', in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. by Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 117-32 (p. 122).

stasis these objects resist their status as commodities.⁵ It was not unusual for the curiosities in such shops to appear severed from the marketplace; one 1898 article describes a proprietor who would 'hide the very objects which he knows the coming connoisseur would surely buy if he should see them.'⁶ As Michael Hancock has said of Victorian curiosity shops, '[t]heir objects, removed from the commercial realm, become *de facto* collections, rather than displays of consumer goods.'⁷ These liminal sites, 'singular curiosities in their own right', take on the aspect of the final resting place of objects even as they purport to offer objects for exchange.⁸ As such, the curiosity shop simultaneously gestures both to the industrial capitalist systems of commodity exchange implicated in its existence, and the ability of objects to signify in excess of those systems.

The Walworth Emporium gives us a glimpse into a nineteenth-century object world not ruled by the marketplace. Seemingly detached from circuits of exchange, the curiosity shop resembles a museum, but is not governed by taxonomy and the conventions of display. To explore collections such as these is to open up the possibility of reorienting our conversations about Victorian things to consider disorder and texture, different ways of being with things outside of the carefully curated visual displays of department stores and museums which, as this introduction goes on to explore, have so frequently dominated our critical conversations about the period. That is the focus of this project; to explore how the Victorian imagination constructed and represented wayward accumulation, through the prism of collecting. Mess, David Trotter suggests, has rarely attracted our critical attention, because 'it interferes in some way with the ascription to experience of meaning and value'

⁵ See Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64-91, for a fuller exploration of how objects might move in and out of commodity status.

⁶ [Anon.], 'Collectors and Collecting', *Chambers's Journal*, 10 December 1898, pp. 26-29 (p. 27).

⁷ Michael W. Hancock, 'Boffin's Books and Darwin's Finches: Victorian Cultures of Collecting', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 2006), p. 106.

⁸ Ibid.

by accommodating and acknowledging chanciness.⁹ '[C]ontingency's signature' is writ large on the collection at the Walworth Emporium.¹⁰ Such jumbles are riotous manifestations of chance, object-worlds which seemingly reject the notion of intent or *telos*, rendered materially in museums through the selection, classification and meaningful display of objects. Running through this thesis is a sensitivity to the ways in which nineteenth-century collectors, through their rejection or subversion of museum modes of collecting, could create just such object worlds.

Beginning with the Victorian collectors Richard and Henry Cuming and their things, I consider how collectors and domestic collections in nineteenth-century fiction and culture acted as a focal point for debates about the proper ways of making meaning in the material world. I seek to explore how cultural understandings of the limits of collecting developed and were articulated in fiction and in other textual forms, rejecting, as the Walworth Emporium rejects, the notion that Victorian objects primarily had meaning in terms of their status as commodities. My main aim is to show how late nineteenth-century understandings of collectors as deviant individuals stem from their transgression of two principles of useful collecting enforced and perpetuated by museum culture – the pre-eminence of the disembodied eye in understanding objects, and the importance of limiting the collection through the careful selection and display of appropriately valuable objects. It is when individuals transgress these boundaries – they get too close to objects, and they accumulate too many – that their activities threaten the meaning-making taking place in museums, and their status as 'collectors' starts to disintegrate. I take these accusations as my foci and explore them in relation to burgeoning discourse on the purpose and utility of museum collections in, and to, Victorian Britain. Through a study of how these limits – 'too close' and 'too much' – were formed and articulated, I seek to understand how these

⁹ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 10.

¹⁰ Trotter, p. 15.

criticisms are connected to wider discourses about how meaning can be made through objects.

This introduction considers the wide variety of collecting activity that the nineteenth century witnessed, suggesting that guidebooks and other incitements to collect frame collecting as a useful, moral activity. I go on to explore mid- to late-Victorian fictions which engage with collectors and to explore how negative portrayals of collectors inherit some of their terms of understanding from previous centuries' anxieties about collectors' self-interest. Finally, I suggest that museum culture changed the nature of such anxieties by outlining how Victorian institutions established the proper parameters and modes of perception to render its 'object lessons' useful to its visitors. I end by proposing, however, that the restrictive codes of the nineteenth-century museum actually worked to silence other kinds of relationships that might have been developed with objects, in service to the state museum's pedagogical aims.

Museums and Collecting: The Cuming Family

The author of the short descriptive piece about Walworth's Emporium of Nicknacks is Henry Syer Cuming, a gentleman collector living in South London, and erstwhile patron of the Emporium. Henry was born in Walworth in 1817 to parents Richard and Ann, and was younger brother to Ann Bagwill (b. 1814) and Richard Howton (b. 1811). The Cumings lived a comfortable and genteel life in Walworth, since Henry's grandfather (also named Richard) had made a felicitous marriage to a widow, Lady Martha Maxwell, in 1768. This marriage appears to have elevated the eldest Richard Cuming from tin-plater to gentleman, and subsequently his descendants were in a financial position which enabled them to dedicate their time to pursuits other than earning a living; his eldest son John

Brompton became a painter, and Richard, a collector.¹¹ By the time he died in 1870, at the stately age of 93, the younger Richard Cuming and his son Henry had amassed an enormous and varied collection. Henry continued collecting until his death in 1902 and between them, father and son assembled over 25,000 objects from around the globe in their South London home.

It is impossible to discern precisely which of the many objects in the Cuming collection were acquired from the Walworth Emporium, as Richard and Henry were not meticulous record-keepers. An undated, abandoned attempt at a manuscript catalogue does not come close to accounting for even a third of the collection's contents, and it remains significantly under-researched even now.¹² This has made the collection difficult to navigate and frequently rendered its objects obscure but also means that some of the material records of the family's collecting practices remain relatively undisturbed; Henry Cuming's pocketbook, for example, still contains crusted pieces of seaweed and hastily scribbled field notes from a trip to the coast.¹³ The collection offers unique insights into the changing interests and collecting habits of two Victorian gentlemen, habits which spanned almost the entirety of the nineteenth century. Although a museum since 1906, after Henry bequeathed the collection to the Parish upon his death along with a sum for the provision of a keeper's salary, the crux of my interest in the Cuming collection is that it was never a public museum during the lifetime of the collectors who pieced it together. There is some

¹¹ See Stephen Humphrey, *An Introduction to the Cuming Family and the Cuming Museum* (London: London Borough of Southwark, 2002).

¹² [Henry Syer Cuming], manuscript catalogue, [n.d.] London, Cuming Museum. Published research into the Cuming collection is limited to Humphrey's *Introduction*, intended as a guide for museum visitors, and Bryn Hyacinth's 'The Ethnographic Collection at the Cuming Museum', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 20 (March 2008), 128-44. The Cumings and their collection also feature in published research into the Leverian Museum, an enormous private museum in London, the collections of which were sold off at auction in 1806. Richard Cuming, Henry's father, visited the museum as a boy and bought several objects at the sale. He was later to acquire several more when they resurfaced in the London curiosity market, and passed his interest in the museum to Henry, who continued to research Leverian objects and their eventual locations well into his old age. See Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Holophusicon: The Leverian Museum, An Eighteenth-Century English Institution of Science, Curiosity, and Art* (Altenstadt, Germany: ZKF Publishers, 2011), which features several objects now in the Cuming Museum.

¹³ See object C02828 in the Cuming Museum's collections.

evidence that the collection was occasionally opened up to respectable visitors,¹⁴ but essentially it remained a private, domestic collection, housed in the Cumings' own family home at 6 Deans Row and then (when the family moved in 1853) 63 Kennington Park Road, half a mile away. Henry Cuming's celebratory tone as he describes the Walworth Emporium is unsurprising when one realises that 'all jumbled together in endless confusion' might equally have served as a description of his own family's collection.

A set of photographs, thought to have been taken in the 1860s, provide a glimpse into how the collection was housed at 63 Kennington Park Road. Figure 1 shows Richard Cuming, seated amongst some of his collection, predominantly ceramics and statuary. He is possibly in the room the family referred to as the 'museum', although, as will be explored in part two of this thesis, by the time the picture was taken the collection covered every room in the house. Objects smother every surface, and some things teeter rather precariously. Figure 2 shows Henry Syer Cuming in what appears to be a different room, though the mantelpiece behind him is full of objects, and the ghostly shape of a large ammonite can be discerned in the bottom left of the picture. Henry holds an open book in his right hand, possibly a reference to his scholarly pursuits; he was an early member of the British Archaeological Association and had many papers published in its journal. There is a marked contrast between the collection as it existed in the Cuming family home, and how it was presented for museum display in the 1920s.

¹⁴ See 'A Private Exhibition of Jubilee Mementoes', *The Walworth Herald and South London Chronicle*, 1 October 1887, p. 25, describing an exhibition at the Cuming household which respectable people might visit. Bryn Hyacinth also notes that the Cuming manuscript catalogue makes reference to a visitor book, although none has ever been found (p. 130).



Figure 1. Portrait photograph of Richard Cuming at 63 Kennington Park Road [n.d.]. Cuming Museum inventory number PS02355.



Figure 2. Portrait photograph of Henry Syer Cuming at 63 Kennington Park Road [n.d.]. Cuming Museum inventory number PS02356.



Figures 3 & 4. Photographs of the interior of the Cuming Museum in the specially built accommodation at the site of Newington Public Library on the Walworth Road. [192(?)]. Cuming Museum, no inventory numbers.





Figure 5. Photograph of Lord Rothschild (front, left), along with J. O. Devereux, Mayor of Southwark, (front, centre) and other local dignitaries at the opening of the Cuming Museum [1906(?)]. Cuming Museum, no inventory number.

Figures 3 and 4 are photographs of the Cuming Museum interior, thought to have been taken in the 1920s. Although the museum was opened in 1906, it is not thought that significant changes occurred in the museum's displays over this period. Figure 5, which shows a glimpse of the interior on the occasion of the opening of the museum, suggests that the line of cases down the centre of the museum remained the same, although it is impossible to make a fuller comparison as the perspectives in figures 3 & 5 may be different. We can see, however, that glass cases replaced the jumble of objects in the Cuming family home, and that objects were labelled and displayed in groups – weapons together, and coins together. Although there are many objects on display both in the collection and the museum, the conditions of their display are quite different.

The transition from collection to museum was not smooth. Henry had specified in his will that his family's collections were to be exhibited in 'a suitable and spacious Gallery or

apartments...in connection with Newington Public Library'.¹⁵ The Metropolitan Borough of Southwark, who ran the library, asked Charles Hercules Read, president of the Society of Antiquaries and Keeper of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography at the British Museum, to assess the collection. Read was unimpressed. He wrote that 'the examination of the collection was disappointing to me, as so very small a proportion of it is of intrinsic interest and so few of the individual specimens of high quality.'¹⁶ The Council considered storing the collection away, and having a small selection of items on display in the library entrance hall. Eventually it was decided that Henry's wish would be granted and new accommodation for the collection was built on the back of the library in 1905. The Cuming Museum opened to the public in 1906 and the Borough Librarian was appointed Curator. The museum remained open until the Second World War, when it was damaged, and some of its objects destroyed, by an incendiary bomb. It was closed from 1941 to 1959, when it reopened with a focus on local history. An injudicious and undocumented lending policy in the 1960s meant that many objects were loaned from the collections, never to be seen again.¹⁷ In March 2013, a devastating fire tore through the Newington Public Library and Cuming Museum. Many of the collections on display were rescued, although the original 1905 museum areas, now filled with the museum's extensive archive, were damaged by both smoke and water. The museum has been closed to the public ever since. Most recently, in August 2015, Southwark Borough Council made the entirety of its Museums and Heritage workforce redundant, in a restructure and review of services.

In dire need of cataloguing, never comprehensively documented, rarely mentioned in published scholarly work, materially inaccessible due to health and safety regulations following the fire, and now seemingly without custodian or curator, initial research for

¹⁵ Henry Cuming, will, MS. London, Cuming Museum.

¹⁶ Quoted in Humphrey, p. 14.

¹⁷ For detail on the museum's misfortunes and losses after 1906, see Hyacinth, p. 138.

this project required me to confront several questions about the neglect of the collection, and its status as both a private collection and a public museum. What is gained or lost when a collection becomes a museum? How did the museum's remit as a site of education transform the objects which filled it? How might the glass cases have changed the experience of visiting the collection? On what criteria did C.H. Read make his decision about the value of the collection (or lack thereof), and would it be the same today? To what extent were the interests of state and municipal museums aligned with the passions of private collectors? How did the museum cope with the problem of the negligible 'intrinsic interest' of its objects? What is the importance of the collection as a whole, and is this different to the significance of its individual objects? Where full and detailed photographic and written records exist, what is the value of the material object itself? What do we stand to lose if the collection is lost?

These questions have remained vital to this research, even as it has, necessarily, moved away from the Cuming collection to consider wider questions of value in nineteenth-century collecting practices. The matter of the collection's value, or otherwise, and how this was perceived by successive iterations of museum professionals led me to consider how the collection might have flouted some of the conventions of Victorian museal practice, and how its idiosyncrasies might have been made uniform during its transition from private collection to public museum. The figures of Richard and Henry Cuming, particularly the latter, and his position in the mechanisms of knowledge-creation in the nineteenth century, at a time when the categories of 'amateur' and 'professional' were only just coming into being, open up the question of how collectors in different settings and in various circumstances were perceived in nineteenth-century culture. Henry's joyful description of the Walworth Emporium of Nicknacks suggests that there might be something worth exploring at the fringes of collecting, at sites where collections overran their spaces, defied categorisation, and revelled in archaism. The Cuming collection, then,

is at the core of this thesis, and its objects provide the points of departure for both of its parts.

Whilst these very real figures have prompted some of the lines of inquiry for this thesis, its main focus is on the various imaginings of collectors which populate Victorian fiction and culture. It takes its formal and methodological cue from explorations of collecting and museum culture by Judith Pascoe, Barbara Black and Ruth Hoberman.¹⁸ Pascoe's *Hummingbird Cabinet*, which aims to demonstrate how 'romantic aesthetics and collecting practice are intertwined',¹⁹ looks to the structures of feeling common across textual and material practices in the Romantic period, identifying that both display 'a longing for permanence, a fascination with perfect beauty, a preoccupation with authenticity [and] a propensity for grandiose endeavors'.²⁰ Chronologically, Black's project picks up where Pascoe's leaves off, with the hundred years from 1837, so although both concur that the material and textual forms that they discuss share ideology, Black characterises the intellectual frameworks which structured Victorian-era collecting as quite distinct from those which dominated during the Romantic period. She considers the museum as 'an impulse or spirit that infused the [Victorian] age and many of its projects',²¹ identifying compilation, arrangement and display as shared activities fundamental to museums and to the other nineteenth-century cultural productions, predominantly literary, with which her work is concerned. Hoberman, meanwhile, takes the years 1890 to 1914 as her focus, identifying a cultural anxiety around the work of museums at the turn of the century. This anxiety, she argues, is both reflected in and encouraged by fiction which stages worrisome museum encounters, as authors used the setting 'as a way of exploring the futility of

¹⁸ Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Barbara J. Black, *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Ruth Hoberman, *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

¹⁹ Pascoe, p. 21.

²⁰ Pascoe, p. 173.

²¹ Black, p. 4.

separating aesthetic from economic and social realms'.²² I take up many of the themes of Pascoe's work, proposing that her interest in how memory, history and imagination function in Romantic-era collecting should be extended right through the nineteenth century, problematizing Black's characterisations of Victorian collecting as merely reproducing the classificatory and power-inflected model of the museum. Rather, I concur with Hoberman's characterisation of mid- to late-nineteenth century culture as more critical of the museum's pedagogical endeavour, and I suggest that collecting's appearance in fiction often works to illuminate moments where objects exceed the roles allotted them within the museum enterprise.

Taken together, these three works suggest a methodological model for this research. Each tackles the intersection of museum and literary cultures in the long nineteenth century, approaching fiction not as 'an end through which to learn about museums, but itself a tangled weave of voices and pressures stimulated by the presence of the museum'.²³ This thesis is a study of how material practices elicit meanings from things, and as such it incorporates museological and anthropological approaches alongside theories of collecting and consumer behaviour. I seek to understand how Victorian collectors understood, displayed and appreciated their objects in particular ways, and the relation of those practices to museum culture. But this is also a study of the relationship between those material practices and print culture. The texts that are considered here, part of that 'tangled weave of voices', bring particular meanings to material practices, positioning human-object encounters as variously useful, educative, comedic, irrational, dirty or dangerous. The practices themselves bring meanings to texts; just as objects accrue values and meanings that they bring with them as they enter collections, collections themselves connote in certain ways in the novels and stories in which they feature. Examining the wider discourses in which Victorian debates about collecting took place allows us to gain a

²² Hoberman, p. 9.

²³ Hoberman, p. 7.

fuller understanding of what meanings collections bring with them into the nineteenth-century texts in which they often appear.

In the main, this project deals with stories and with novels. The fiction considered will sometimes engage directly with the figure of the collector, as in the case of Henry James, Charles Dickens, and Vernon Lee. At other times I will deliberately consider texts in which the act of collecting is peripheral, but which nonetheless actively participate in forming and articulating the boundaries of what can be considered a productive and appropriate relationship between people and things in the nineteenth century. Collecting's continued presence in the literature of the period, as both a theme and a backdrop, indicates not only its prominent position in the culture of the nineteenth century, but also the fraught nature of this position. As Carolyn Steedman writes of Victorian realism's persistent foregrounding of the material details of everyday life, 'the Philosophy of Dust - speaks of...a grand circularity, of nothing ever, ever going away.'²⁴ For Steedman, this is what Victorian fiction confronts and attempts to express - '[t]o recognise and deal with the understanding that nothing goes away: to deal with Dust'.²⁵ Steedman's contention is that the attempt to make meaning, and the attempt to make progress mean, is an integral part of nineteenth-century literature. This is an aim shared explicitly by the museum culture of the period, as this introduction will go on to explore in more detail. Just as literature attempts to sort through the 'grand circularity' of matter, Victorian collecting, I argue, whilst drawing on the structures of museum culture, constitutes an attempt, on slightly different terms, to confront this same proliferation of persistent stuff.

As a study of the contingent meanings of collecting, this research also draws upon newspaper journalism, government reports, interior advice manuals, pamphlets, and articles in the periodical press. These less consciously literary productions are both

²⁴ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 166.

²⁵ Steedman, p. 167. I examine dust itself in more detail in part two of this thesis.

illustrative of and help to produce the parameters of acceptable collecting. Considering them in conjunction with fiction's collectors elucidates the cultural forces which give rise to the particular imaginings of the nineteenth century. At times, then, this thesis will be overtly historicist in its practice, 'invok[ing] the vastness of the textual archive' by placing minor cultural texts in conversation with the literary canon (particularly in chapter four, which deals with Dickens and miserly figures).²⁶ These various commentaries and textual incarnations of collectors articulate, I argue, a set of parameters outside of which accumulative practices are characterised as aberrant. The point at which collectors becomes problematic, I propose, in fiction and in the popular imagination, is the point at which they deviate from the proper limits of collecting set by the nineteenth century's burgeoning museum culture and the display tropes it deployed. By exploring the textual moments in which collectors are parodied, derided, and caricatured, I expose some of the contexts at the core of the nineteenth century's anxieties about its rapidly changing relationship with the material world.

Commodities and Things: The State of Victorian Studies

Much important work has been done by scholars attending to histories of the commodity in order to better understand how nineteenth-century culture and society took shape around the rise of industry and empire. Jeff Nunokawa's *The Afterlife of Property* traces anxieties in Victorian fiction around the new profligacy of commodity status, which attached itself to forms previously safe from the marketplace; Thomas Richards' *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* explores how the rise of the commodity was intimately involved with the culture of spectacle; Andrew Miller's *Novels Behind Glass* argues that Victorian fictions register an acute awareness of new appetites for

²⁶ Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), p. 16.

commodities and display.²⁷ Most recently and perhaps notably, Elaine Freedgood's much-cited 2006 study *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* urges us to investigate the material histories of those commodified objects which proliferate in the landscape of nineteenth-century texts.²⁸ Freedgood's call to cease reading things in novels as weak metonyms and to attend to their status as products of industry, exchange, and imperialism, has uncovered rich new contexts for our readings of Victorian fiction, if at times it burdens fiction's incidental objects with meanings that exceed their significance.²⁹ Isobel Armstrong writes of Freedgood's work that there exists 'a poetics of things that is not always met by their material histories alone, even when these are illuminating'.³⁰ This thesis sets out to explore those poetics, which are often esoteric and frequently not fully articulable. In doing so, I suggest that our understanding of the nineteenth century as a period in which commodity fetishism dominated relationships between people and things has blinkered our understandings of how Victorians felt about the objects which proliferated their world. Victorians understood the things about them to be the resting places of memory, history, emotion, and relationships - tangible objects which acted not only as the *markers* of these intangible things but were *the very places* where those things might accumulate and reside. Peter Stallybrass, in his careful exploration of how things might straddle the categories of both commodity and keepsake, remarks on the semantic trick of Marx's term 'commodity fetishism'; 'the commodity becomes a commodity not as a thing but as an exchange value. It achieves its purest form, in fact, when most emptied out of particularity and thingliness...to fetishize the commodity is to fetishise abstract

²⁷ Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle 1851-1914* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990); Miller, *Novels Behind Glass*.

²⁸ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²⁹ See Claire Pettit, 'Peggotty's Work-Box: Victorian Souvenirs and Material Memory', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 53 (2009), <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ravon/2009/v/n53/029896ar.html>> for a cautious reading of Freedgood.

³⁰ Isobel Armstrong, 'Bodily Things and Thingly Bodies: Circumventing the Subject-Object Binary' in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 17-41 (p. 20).

exchange-value'.³¹ Commodity fetishism does not describe an excessive affection for materially tangible objects themselves, but rather an attachment to meanings divorced from things - Marx writes in *Capital* that to abstract the thing to a commodity involves not only an evacuation of its use-value in favour of its exchange value, but an abstraction 'from the material elements and shapes which make the product a use-value...its existence as a material thing is put out of sight'.³² Without denying the centrality of the rise of industrial capitalism and the commodity form to Victorian culture, this thesis seeks to set out how objects operated and were understood outside of those dynamics, and how collections might have been a space in which to seek understandings of those other 'material elements and shapes'.

I seek to follow the recent work of Bill Brown and others in suspending interest in objects as commodities in order to better attend to the other forms of relationships between humans and things which Victorian texts continually ask us to pay heed to. Of his recent attempts to reclaim the 'thingness' of things, Brown writes that he is willing to sacrifice 'the clarity of thinking about things as objects of consumption, on the one hand, in order to see how, on the other, our relation to things cannot be explained by the cultural logic of capitalism.'³³ This seems a worthwhile sacrifice, for although the rise of commodity culture in the nineteenth century undoubtedly inflected human-object relations in numerous ways, the Victorians' interest in literary tourism, antiques, and the relics of the past, and their acute awareness of the material detritus infecting new urban environments demonstrates that they were vividly, imaginatively alive to other modes of human-object

³¹ Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx's Coat', in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. by Patricia Spyer (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 183-207 (pp. 183-84).

³² Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 15. See also Stallybrass, 'Marx's Coat' and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), both of which further explore Marx's description of the evacuation of sensuous properties in the commodity form. For another perspective on Marx's relationship to the senses see David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

³³ Brown, pp. 5-6. See also Jennifer Sattaur's précis of Victorian studies' 'material turn', 'Thinking Objectively: An Overview of "Thing Theory" in Victorian Studies', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 40 (2012), 347-57.

relation. It is my contention that collections themselves offered sites and opportunities for collectors to explore their relationships with the world of things quite apart from their encounters with commodities. I take my cue from Victorian collectors themselves; an 1898 article on the benefits of collecting asks how a philatelist should 'sell at its mere market value a Mulready envelope when one remembers the joy with which one found it...How should a five-pound note appear in any way the equivalent of a certain obsolete Ceylon, when one can recall, if one opens the album at the page it adorns, the tale of how it was stolen while its owner was at school, and recovered only after two whole terms of detective work'?³⁴ Collected items clearly had meanings which could far outstrip their status as commodities. Crucial though the marketplace was to shaping and defining human-object relations in this period, the domestic collection was a site in which the discourses of imperialism and capitalism remained present, but which also allowed other imaginings of human-object relations. The dimensions of human relationships to the things which we own and encounter are numerous, and an enriched understanding of the position of the domestic collection in Victorian culture and society might be a way to better illuminate some of the relations between objects and people in this period which 'complicate the straightforward commodity-based models described by economic politics'.³⁵ Objects in the home were of course never completely safe from re-entering the commercial world, as the Victorian dread of house clearances suggests, and a culture of pawning meant that among certain social strata at least, domestic things were never entirely divested of their status as commodities.³⁶ The depleting mantelpiece in George Cruikshank's temperance illustration *The Bottle*, published in 1847, was a symbol of the falling fortunes of the home and a reminder that decorative and aesthetic luxuries could

³⁴ 'Collectors and Collecting', p. 26.

³⁵ Sattaur, p. 349.

³⁶ See David Trotter, 'House Clearances in Victorian Fiction' 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 6 (2008) < <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.472> > and Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property*, where he argues that the home's status as a safe space is constantly being undermined in Victorian fiction.

always re-enter the circles of exchange and commerce.³⁷ Object biographies which track the movements of artefacts and collectibles through the complex network of dealers and salesrooms in nineteenth-century Britain demonstrate the myriad marketplaces with which the activities of collectors intersected.³⁸ However, the home could act as a privileged cultural space in which, as Thad Logan suggests, 'material things simultaneously asserted and concealed a relation to the marketplace', and as such it was also a place in which relationships other than that between commodity and consumer could be established.³⁹ This thesis seeks to build on Logan's claim by exploring what new meanings might come into play when the marketplace is concealed. Instead, I look to the history and theory of museum culture to explain attitudes toward domestic collecting in the nineteenth century, probing the cultural forms and spaces in which accumulations become problematic and troubling, in order to worry away at the question 'how do collections mean?'

Museum Culture and Imitative Collecting

The nineteenth century witnessed the burgeoning of museum and exhibition culture in Britain. In 1845 the Museums Act gave to local councils the power to raise funds, through taxes, for municipal museums, and by 1902 the Education Act enshrined museum-going as part of the curriculum.⁴⁰ The Great Exhibition in 1851 had alerted a generation of Britons to the power of the assemblage, and museums and travelling exhibitions quickly became part of the fabric of cultural life in Britain. The success of the Exhibition paid for the

³⁷ George Cruikshank, *The Bottle, in eight plates* (London: 1847) <<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-bottle--a-series-of-temperance-themed-illustrations-by-george-cruikshank-with-poetry-by-charles-mackay>> [Accessed 12 April 2015]. See also Stallybrass, p. 196.

³⁸ The fruitful concept of the object biography was proposed by Arjun Appadurai in 'Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3-63. Adrienne L. Kaeppler's exhaustive study of objects from the Leverian Museum, *Holophusicon*, illustrates the paths that objects can take in an out of public institutions. Kaeppler traces hundreds of objects, illuminating in the process nineteenth century London's world of dealers, auctions, sales and shows through which many of the objects move seemingly endlessly.

³⁹ Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. xiii.

⁴⁰ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 111.

establishment of permanent museums in South Kensington, and industrial towns around the country followed suit, with civic museums in Liverpool, Nottingham, Sheffield and Birmingham opening in the years between 1853 and 1885. Economic prosperity allowed the ‘massive development of building and professional superstructure’ which institutions of accumulation needed.⁴¹ Museum administrators since at least the eighteenth century had been keen to establish the museum as a site quite distinct from private, domestic collections. In 1759, James Empson, then holding the position of Head of Natural and Artificial Productions at the newly established British Museum, and having presided over the Sloane collections before they became public, wrote ‘[h]ow much so ever a private Person may be at Liberty arbitrarily to dispose & place his Curiosities; we are sensible, that the British Museum, being a public Institution subject to the Visits of the Judicious & Intelligent, as well as Curious, Notice will be taken, whether or no the Collection has been arranged in a methodical Manner.’⁴² Empson’s emphasis on the importance of ‘methodical’ display reflects his perception of the public museum’s responsibility to educate, and he places this in direct contrast with the ‘arbitrary’ arrangement which the private collector can indulge in; thus, right at the outset, the museum’s administration built its difference from private collections into its founding principles. Over a hundred years later, museum reformer Thomas Greenwood wrote that:

The educational character of Museums is only now becoming generally recognised, and the usefulness of a Museum in this respect does not depend entirely so much on the number or intrinsic value of its treasures as on the proper arrangement, classification, and naming of the various specimens in so clear a way that the

⁴¹ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 113.

⁴² Quoted in Marjorie Caygill, ‘Sloane’s Will and the Establishment of the British Museum’, in Arthur MacGregor, ed., *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), pp. 45-68 (p. 55).

uninitiated may grasp quickly the purpose and meaning of each particular specimen.⁴³

Greenwood's perspective on the importance of display for rendering objects useful is representative of the view shared by other museum legislators and administrators.⁴⁴ Things themselves might be valuable or provoke curiosity, but Empson and Greenwood appear to agree that proper display and interpretation could transform them into lessons. In the nineteenth century this was to become an important way of distinguishing 'useful' collecting from useless accumulation. As Arthur MacGregor notes, '[a]n essential factor in distinguishing the museum collection from other accumulations of material...is the presence of a purposeful display programme which articulates the collection in some way.'⁴⁵ The emphasis on the importance of pedagogic display that accompanied the establishment of museum culture represents a break with the collecting practices of previous centuries which were almost solely an amusement for the private enjoyment and enrichment of a scholarly elite.

One of the earliest forms of collecting was the compilation of early modern cabinets of curiosity, common across Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. They were put together according to the principle of 'curiosity', a loaded term with many inflections which broadly denoted a mode of inquiry into the natural world. Recent scholarship means that we now understand these cabinets as attempts to represent the universe in miniature through the selection of objects, many rare or abnormal, which stood in for larger ideas or concepts.⁴⁶ Historically, however, cabinets of curiosity have been

⁴³ Thomas Greenwood, *Museums and Art Galleries*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1888), p. 8.

⁴⁴ See *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources*, ed. by Jonah Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 54.

⁴⁶ On our changing conceptions of the apparent unruliness of cabinets of curiosity, see Sophie Thomas, "'Things on holiday': Collections, Museums, and the Poetics of Unruliness', *European*

associated with the variously morbid or prurient, but certainly unintellectual, whims of the individual collectors who compiled them. Much scholarship has addressed the 'morally slippery' connotations of curiosity since the sixteenth century.⁴⁷ Susan Crane describes how, toward the end of the eighteenth century, 'curiosity' connoted an inferior intellectual drive, an unscholarly emotional dimension to accumulation, and a particular shallow desire to acquire. As a distinctly negative term, it was used to distinguish between connoisseurs and the 'merely curious' collector, with the distinction, Crane says, resting 'primarily on the amount of skill given to the study as well as the depth of the desire to learn, as opposed to the desire to be reflected in the glory of the possessions'.⁴⁸ Curiosity continued to be associated with superficiality and an insufficiently intellectualised attitude toward collecting into the nineteenth century; as Stephen Bann notes, 'for the Victorian period, "curiosity" still had the force of a subversive paradigm whose potency threatened the benevolent ideal of useful instruction, and the progressive onward march of modern history'.⁴⁹ Curiosity's association with the aberrant, the sacred, and the individual object (over and above groups of objects from which patterns could be identified and laws inferred), made it inimical to the museum's project of communicating a narrative of progress.⁵⁰ Therefore museums which incorporated older collections had to think carefully about how objects accumulated under an entirely different rubric of selection could be displayed.⁵¹ No longer was curiosity considered an appropriate principle upon

Romantic Review, 20:2 (2009), 167-75, and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 105-32.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Thomas, 'Licensed Curiosity: Cook's Pacific Voyages', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 116-36 (p. 122). See also Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Susan A. Crane, 'Curious Cabinets and Imaginary Museums', in *Museums and Memory*, ed. by Susan A. Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 60-80; MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment*.

⁴⁸ Crane, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Stephen Bann, 'The Return to Curiosity', p. 121.

⁵⁰ Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 14-15. See also Bann's 'Shrines, Curiosities and the Rhetoric of Display' in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, ed. by Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (New York: New Press, 1998), pp. 14-29.

⁵¹ On the 'discontinuous relation' between cabinets of curiosity and later public museums, see Steven Mullaney, 'Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance', *Representations*, 3 (1983), 40-67 and Anthony Alan Shelton, 'Cabinets of

which to base arrangement; Renaissance collections and cabinets of curiosity appeared unruly and disordered.⁵²

An anonymous writer in an 1860 issue of *Cornhill's Magazine* confidently pokes fun at the Royal Society's exhibits from the early eighteenth century, including, to his derision and amazement, the 'sceptre of an Indian king, a dog without a mouth; a Pegue hat and organ; a bird of paradise; a Jewish phylactery' and 'a model of the Temple of Jerusalem.'⁵³ What 'queer, almost silly things', he laughs, 'queer and silly, at least to us, with our magnificent museums in Great Russell Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Brompton'.⁵⁴ The great nineteenth-century museums had changed the notion of what display was for: no longer were the curiosities and oddments of earlier centuries considered museum-worthy. In fact, objects which had been items of curiosity may have remained on display but were recast under a different light, as 'folkloric' or 'superstitious', in order to illuminate the movement away from magical or pagan systems of belief, part of a global process of enlightenment and progress.⁵⁵ Annie Coombes writes that for museum ethnographers at the turn of the century, the terms 'curio' and 'curiosity' were 'a bone of contention...and early acknowledged by them as one of the major hindrances to any effective educational use of ethnographic material.'⁵⁶ The way to counter the potential for the discourse of curiosity to trivialise the museum was 'orderly arrangement and the transformation of mere curios into objects of scientific interest by appropriate classification'.⁵⁷ As such, an

Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 177-203.

⁵² See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of Ethnography', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 387-443, also Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 8.

⁵³ [Anon], 'William Hogarth', *Cornhill Magazine*, 1:4 (1860), pp. 417-37 (p. 424). On the genesis of the Royal Society's collections, see Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 133-66.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Crane, 'Curious Cabinets and Imaginary Museums', p. 79, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 392. On how this shift operated in the Louvre, see Hooper-Greenhill, pp. 179-82.

⁵⁶ Coombes, p. 113.

⁵⁷ *Museums Journal* vol. 4, September 1904, p. 101, and *Monthly Record*, July 1904, p. 6, quoted in Coombes, p. 113.

increased attention to the need for instructive display occurs in the second half of the century. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has described how things ceased to be given the opportunity to speak for themselves, as a proliferation of guidebooks and labels attempted to increase the didactic impact of the museum experience - no longer were things just things but they were 'object lessons', there to instruct the viewer and to illustrate a particular train of thought which the curation of the display was meant to encourage.⁵⁸ Part one of this thesis will more closely consider modes of nineteenth-century museum display and how, as Tony Bennett has influentially argued, they 'aimed to inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own'.⁵⁹

The development of museum culture undoubtedly had an influence on the popularity of collecting. Victorian Britons embraced the pastime whole-heartedly; by 1891 it could be claimed that 'everyone with any pretensions to taste, be he learned or unlearned, collects something.'⁶⁰ *The Graphic* declared in 1869 that 'this is a collecting age', and the proliferation of instructional guides and handbooks to aid the amateur collector published from the 1830s onwards serves to confirm this astutely self-conscious statement.⁶¹ The first edition of Charles Darwin's journal of the voyage of the *Beagle*, published in 1839, ended with a section entitled 'Advice to Collectors' wherein Darwin advised the would-be collector how best to organise and arrange their pursuits and collections so that they might serve as an aid to learning and discovery.⁶² Natural history, of course, covered a great many branches of knowledge, and the nineteenth century witnessed a fashion for collecting in most of them. Seaweed collecting was a popular pastime later in the century,

⁵⁸ Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, p. 395.

⁵⁹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 95.

⁶⁰ C.D., 'Old Silver', *Hearth and Home*, 21 May 1891, p. 19.

⁶¹ [Anon.], 'Her Majesty the Queen', *The Graphic*, 4 December 1869, pp. 12-15 (p. 12).

⁶² Charles Darwin, *Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle, Volume III. Journal and remarks. 1832-1836* (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), pp. 599-602. Reproduced in facsimile at darwin-online.org.uk [Accessed 5 March 2015].

and books such as Shirley Hibberd's *The Seaweed Collector: A Handy Guide to the Marine Botanist* (1872) and A.B. Hervey's *Sea Mosses: A Collector's Guide and an Introduction to the Study of Marine Algæ* (1881) could induct the botanist into the art.⁶³ Indoor aquariums were another popular form of domestic collection, as were ferns, whether living or pressed in scrapbooks. Fern-collectors in the grip of pteridomania (a term Charles Kingsley coined for the craze) could consult Edward Newman's *A History of British Ferns*, published in 1840.⁶⁴ Such instructional books invariably portrayed collecting as a morally enriching activity. In 1838, John Obadiah Westwood, writing in his *Entomologist's text book*, asks, assured of the reply, 'can it be denied that if, among the lower classes, the collecting of objects of nature, and such-like pursuits, were more general, the vice of drunkenness and the reign of gin-palaces would be over?'⁶⁵ These views echo through much nineteenth-century discourse on both the public museum and the private collection. Another of the favourite claims of guidebooks was that collecting was an accessible activity, in which, if only they might cultivate the inclination, almost anyone could participate – particularly if the subject were botany, entomology, or geology. Gideon Mantell, a geologist who remained somewhat on the fringes of the scientific elite, published popular books to instruct amateur geologists and fossil-hunters in their art. The 1854 edition of his book *Medals of Creation* declares that geology 'can be followed in whatever condition of life we may be placed, and wherever our fortunes may lead us'.⁶⁶ The collecting of rock and fossil specimens was indeed a hugely popular activity, as the expansion of the rail network in the 1830s and 40s enabled newly-mobile collectors to

⁶³ Shirley Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector: A Handy Guide to the Marine Botanist* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1872), Google ebook; A. B., *Sea Mosses: A Collector's Guide and an Introduction to the Study of Marine Algæ* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1881), Reproduced at <<https://archive.org/details/seamossescollect001herv>> [Accessed 3 March 2015].

⁶⁴ Edward Newman, *A History of British Ferns* (London: John Van Voorst, 1840), <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.23220>>.

⁶⁵ John Obadiah Westwood, *The Entomologist's Text Book: An Introduction to the Natural History, Structure, Physiology and Classification of Insects, including the Crustacea and Arachnida* (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co. Amen Corner, 1838), p. 29. Google ebook.

⁶⁶ Gideon Mantell, *The Medals of Creation; or, First Lessons in Geology and the Study of Organic Remains*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), p. 2.

reach the coast, and publications such as Mantell's provided them with the knowledge to recognise and classify their finds.

Collecting, then, was one of the many ways in which the emerging scientific discourse of the nineteenth century was domesticated.⁶⁷ What was understood as enriching for adults was perceived as positively character-forming for young children, and the belief that '[y]oung people should be trained to collect' was widespread.⁶⁸ The nation's youth were given practical advice and instruction on gathering and displaying their collections in books, magazines, and periodicals which aimed to instill them with moral values of diligence, attention, duty and piety.⁶⁹ Mantell, as well as writing popular geology for an adult audience, also encouraged young would-be collectors in *Thoughts on a Pebble*, first published in 1836 and going through several editions.⁷⁰ Mary Whitley's *Every Girl's Book of Sport, Occupation and Pastime*, published in 1897, suggests several suitable subjects for collections that young ladies might pursue; pressed flowers, autographs, butterflies, pictures of churches, and stamps.⁷¹ C. A. Montresor's *Some Hobby Horses and How to Ride Them* (1888) urged that 'every house ought to possess a "Museum"',⁷² and aimed to provide a basic knowledge in heraldry, seals and crests, to set the would-be collector in the right direction. Montresor encouraged children to view their collections as potential contributors to the advancement of knowledge, writing that through meticulous record-keeping, 'you may be the means of preserving some very valuable little item of history

⁶⁷ See Virginia Zimmerman, 'Natural History on Blocks, in Bodies, and on the Hearth: Juvenile Science Literature and Games, 1850-1875', *Configurations* 19:3 (2011), 407-30.

⁶⁸ 'Collectors and Collecting', p. 26.

⁶⁹ See volume 3, 'Imperial Voices', of *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting*, ed. by Susan Pearce, Rosemary Flanders, Mark Hall and Fiona Morton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁷⁰ Gideon Mantell, *Thoughts on a Pebble, or, a First Lesson in Geology*, 8th edn (London: Reeve, Benham and Reeve, 1849).

⁷¹ Mary Whitley, *Every Girl's Book of Sport, Occupation and Pastime* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1897), p. 349-52. Google ebook.

⁷² C. A. Montresor, *Some Hobby Horses and How to Ride Them* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1888), p. 192.

which might have been forgotten as ages rolled by.⁷³ Whitley's girls are advised to carefully find an appropriate format for the preservation and display of their finds, as collections 'should answer the grand aim of acquiring an enlarged and ennobling knowledge of the wonders of creation'.⁷⁴ Indeed, Thomas Greenwood's survey of municipal museums in 1888 records the importance of donations to the Ludlow museum from the collections of local children whose interest in natural history has contributed to the museum 'many interesting specimens of fossils, shells, seeds, &c'.⁷⁵ Museum collections were held up as the gold standard for children to aspire to; Montresor chides and encourages her young readers with the promise that 'if you only take pains and pride yourself on being accurate in your information, you may easily make a collection which will only be inferior in size, and not at all in quality, to Fairbarn's collection of crests in Kensington Museum'.⁷⁶ One museum reformer saw children's personal collecting as training for their visit to public museums, writing that 'the private Museum is the key to the great public Museum', even suggesting that 'with the young especially it is almost better to collect any kind of specimens than nothing'.⁷⁷ Keeping one's collection in order was essential for rendering it useful – that is, instructional. A collection in disarray, or without attendant research, was to be avoided. An orderly display was a mark of good character and moral upstanding. For the evangelical domestic advice writer Julia McNair Wright, 'arranging the objects in the midst of which we live is establishing between us and them bonds of appropriateness or convenience: it is fixing habits without which man tends towards the savage state'.⁷⁸ This pious rhetoric infused much popular discourse about collecting. When properly conducted, then, it was claimed that collecting could educate the

⁷³ Montresor, p. 75.

⁷⁴ Whitley, p. 351.

⁷⁵ Greenwood, p. 117.

⁷⁶ Montresor, p. 75.

⁷⁷ W. Stanley Jevons, 'The Use and Abuse of Museums', in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources*, ed. by Jonah Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 283-99 (p. 289).

⁷⁸ Julia McNair Wright, *The Complete Home; An Encyclopædia of Domestic Life and Affairs* (Philadelphia: J.C. McCurdy & Co., 1879), p. 466. McNair Wright is quoting the French architect Sauvestre here, but she repeats his words as gospel.

mind and have a positive influence on taste; it was entertaining, good for the constitution, and, for the young at least, was rarely viewed as a pecuniary pursuit.

But collectors' interests in the nineteenth century extended far outside the realm of natural history. Traditionally, art collecting had been a pursuit available only to the most wealthy aristocracy, but as the century wore on, even this elite practice opened up to new collectors, with new money. Arthur MacGregor understands the 1848 house clearance sale at Stowe as the herald of a new era of democratised art collecting, as 'the remainder of the nineteenth century was...to be marked by a gravitational shift in the collecting scene, with both public institutions and private collectors of middling rank making significant inroads into territory formerly dominated by the aristocracy'.⁷⁹ New collectors also meant new areas of interest, and the world of art collecting expanded to accommodate antiquities, applied arts, and decorative arts which were traditionally held in less esteem.⁸⁰ The adornment of the home was promoted by interior design writers such as Charles Eastlake and J. W. Loftie, and toward the end of the century antique collecting became a favourite pursuit of the wealthy middle classes.⁸¹ The railways opened up day-tripping and holidaying to a new section of the population, and mass-produced souvenirs became a popular way to materially memorialise seaside visits. It was widely supposed that collecting could be pursued by anyone, at any level.

John Charles Robinson, a leading figure at the South Kensington Museum, wrote in 1856 that 'the establishment of public museums...[had] render[ed] the taste for collecting

⁷⁹ Arthur MacGregor, 'Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators in the Victorian Age', in *A. W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. by Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1997), pp. 6-33 (p. 6).

⁸⁰ MacGregor, 'Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators', p. 9.

⁸¹ See Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 145-69.

almost universal amongst educated persons',⁸² and this causal link has remained established in scholarship to the present day; Barbara Black, for example, has claimed that Victorians collected 'in homage to museums'.⁸³ And it is true that in the period, public and private collecting were almost inextricably linked to the point that the distinction, in some cases, breaks down; Arthur MacGregor writes that the two were 'intimately interrelated in the nineteenth century in a way that they certainly were not before and probably have not been since'.⁸⁴ Jacqueline Yallop's study of Robinson's role as curator and Art Referee at the South Kensington Museum is illustrative of the degree to which the tastes of one individual at this period could dictate the acquisitions policy of an institution and how a member of staff might use his own position as a collector to improve the fortunes of the museum, and vice versa.⁸⁵ Yallop has demonstrated the ways in which not only were private interests often implicated in the museum's acquisitions and displays – after all, institutions are made up of individuals, each with their own agendas and motivations – but also the way that the acquisition activities of large institutions like the British Museum could impact on the activities of private collectors working in the same marketplace. Neil Chambers has investigated how the personal interests of Sir Joseph Banks influenced his ongoing work with the British Museum, further demonstrating how relations between the two are complex and reciprocal, particularly when those private collectors are involved in museum administration or policy.⁸⁶ Of course, even in the case of the collections of those far less wealthy and eminent than Banks or Robinson, there is a degree of negotiation between the private collection and the museum, as objects can pass repeatedly between the two. Museums rely, to varying extent, on collectors; many nineteenth-century museums, particularly outside of London, could exercise little choice over the flow of

⁸² J. C. Robinson, *Catalogue of the Soulages Collection...exhibited to the Public at the Museum of Ornamental Art, Marlborough House* (London: 1856), pp. iv-v, quoted in MacGregor, 'Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators', p. 26.

⁸³ Black, p. 4.

⁸⁴ MacGregor, 'Collectors, Connoisseurs and Curators', p. 26.

⁸⁵ Jacqueline Yallop, *Magpies, Squirrels and Thieves: How the Victorians Collected the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011).

⁸⁶ Neil Chambers, *Joseph Banks and the British Museum: The World of Collecting, 1770-1830* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007).

objects into their collections, relying mainly on what was gifted to them, often by avid amateur collectors.⁸⁷ And, as in the case of the Cuming Museum, collections which began as private could later be donated to public museums or form the basis of museums in their own right.⁸⁸ If we set out to study history's collectors, it is invariably those collections which are now associated with institutions that we encounter. However, my encounter with the Cuming collection hints that there is more to be teased out of the relationship between museums and collecting in this period than Robinson and Black suggest. Certainly, nineteenth-century instructional literature dictates that collectors, old and young, should aim to emulate museum culture, such that now 'the idea of the museum has become fundamental to collecting practices beyond the museum'.⁸⁹ Victorian collectors were taught to aspire to be useful; to gather objects which furthered knowledge and to carefully identify, arrange and display them so that their place within the wider field became apparent. But as the Walworth Emporium demonstrates, not all collecting was useful, coherent and articulate. Some was messy, jumbled, and archaic.

The close relationship between private collections and public displays which developed during the Victorian period means that our ideas about what constitutes 'collecting' are closely moulded on the museum model. It is this project's aim to interrogate the genesis of these culturally-determined parameters. How might collecting *differ* from museum display? What practices were Victorian collectors pursuing that museums expressly rejected? Walter Benjamin, to whose writings on collecting this thesis frequently turns, writes that '[e]ven though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter,'

⁸⁷ See Kate Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity: Domestic, Familial, and Everyday "Old Things" in English Museums, 1850-1939', *Museum History Journal*, 4:2 (2011), 203-22 (p. 207); also Thomas Greenwood's comments on the Ludlow Museum, above.

⁸⁸ There are numerous contemporaneous examples; the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford, York Castle museum, which began with the collection of John Kirk, and the Horniman and John Soane Museums in London are just a few.

⁸⁹ Sharon Macdonald, 'Collecting Practices', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 81-97 (p. 81).

recognising the special and particular attendance to things which is attainable in these sites.⁹⁰ This research recognises the importance of museum culture to what Rémy Saisselin has called ‘the democratization of collecting’ that occurred in the nineteenth century.⁹¹ But it also suggests how much we ignore when we look to museums to explain collecting, and how much fruitful enquiry might be had by looking into where culture polices the boundary of what an acceptable collection can be, what, and how much it can contain, and how it might be displayed.⁹² If ‘the history of collecting is...the narrative of how human beings have striven to accommodate, to appropriate and to extend the taxonomies and systems of knowledge they have inherited’,⁹³ shouldn’t our enquiries into the collecting habit attend to what happens on the peripheries, where the borders of collecting are pushed and even sometimes disappear? Whilst histories of institutions play a valuable part in deepening our understanding of the structuring of human-object relations, it is equally important to study the collecting practices and habits of individual, private collectors, for it is here that we may discover how the Victorian public modified the tropes which the museum deployed. Indeed, close readings of fiction’s collectors suggest that we need to complicate the view that Victorians collected ‘in homage to museums’.⁹⁴

Fictions of Collecting: Too Close, Too Much

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 68.

⁹¹ Rémy Saisselin, *Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. xii.

⁹² Museum Studies is beginning to respond to similar challenges. Fiona Candlin’s 2015 project ‘Micromuseums’ asks how ideas about curation, display, visitors and objects themselves might change if the discipline took as models tiny, independently owned and run museums, rather than state-sponsored, internationally renowned institutions such as the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. (*Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)).

⁹³ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, ‘Introduction’, *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 1-6 (p. 2).

⁹⁴ Black, p. 4.

In fact, Victorians invested a great deal of imaginative labour into exploring the limits of useful collecting. Far from being populated by portrayals of collectors making great discoveries and furthering the limits of human knowledge, the landscape of Victorian literature is littered with collectors whose dogged pursuit of their object leads them into dubious moral territory, misanthropes whose material passions divorce them from society, and homes brimming with objects which belie a troubled history. Collectors are almost always a troubling presence in Victorian fiction, sometimes comic but invariably fanatical to the point of pathology. Kristin Mahoney writes that ‘the collector came to epitomize the deleterious effects of market society on the modern subject’s ethical capacity, historical awareness, and aesthetic sensibility’, so that by the *fin de siècle*, ‘the caricature of the misanthropic and alienated collector was ubiquitous in popular print culture’.⁹⁵ Indeed, the collector’s isolation from human society was often portrayed as both a result and symptom of his passion for inanimate things. There are numerous examples. Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859) features Mr Fairlie, an aged collector in an ‘insular skin’, more dedicated to his collection than to his family or estate.⁹⁶ Fairlie is a curmudgeonly, misanthropic hypochondriac whose ‘selfish affectation’ of delicate nerves keeps him locked up indoors with his pictures, china and ornaments, a gross caricature of a type that, by 1859, was familiar to Victorian audiences.⁹⁷ ‘The Rival Collectors’, a short story by H. F. Abell which appeared in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1887, pits ‘sharp, decisive, immovable and hard-hearted’ museum curator Artculus Bone against local collector Jack Wagstaff in the hunt for an ancient Roman stone.⁹⁸ Their misadventures eventually end in harmony, but the tale relies on the prevalent stereotype of competitive obsessives, and heaps derision on the ‘true antiquarian zeal’ of the pair.⁹⁹ Similarly,

⁹⁵ Kristin Mahoney, ‘Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Collecting in *The Connoisseur: An Illustrated Magazine for Collectors*, 1901-1914’ *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 45:2 (2012), 175-99 (p. 175).

⁹⁶ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 32.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ H. F. Abell, ‘The Rival Collectors’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, December 1887, pp. 521-28 (p. 521).

⁹⁹ Abell, p. 523.

Richard Marsh's pair of comically competitive collectors, Tress and Pugh, from his 1898 collection of tales, *Curios: Some Strange Adventures of Two Bachelors*, conform to the now-established figure of the obsessive gentleman collector. Tress and Pugh repeatedly deceive and outsmart one another in their endless competition to add rare and valuable objects to their collections, and there is more than a hint of parody in Marsh's portrayal of Pugh, in one episode, staring at a recently-acquired cabinet 'with the sense of reverential awe which is only found in the true connoisseur whose soul is attuned to higher things'.¹⁰⁰ Confusion between legitimate, human objects of affection and a deranged passion for objects is a frequently recurring theme in tales of maniac collectors, and this thesis will consider several more such episodes.

Recent work by Michael Hancock has addressed in detail 'the increasingly critical portrayal of collectors by later Victorian authors'.¹⁰¹ Hancock shows that increased scepticism about Britain's imperial reach contributed to the growing unease evident around depictions of collectors in fiction toward the end of the nineteenth century. This registers particularly in the portrayal of interiors filled with the spoils of empire; the Meagles family home in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857) contains 'some traces of the migratory habits of the family', a vast array of displayed goods including 'Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hair-pins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filagree, Neopolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all round by the Pope himself, and an infinite variety of lumber.'¹⁰² Barbara Black reads in this array Dickens' concern with the period's vulgar 'appropriation of the world',¹⁰³ and Julia Prewitt-Brown calls it an 'imperial masquerade of trophies gathered from afar, evidence of the transformation of all cultural values into a

¹⁰⁰ Richard Marsh, *Curios: Some Strange Adventures of Two Bachelors* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007 [originally published London: John Long, 1898], p. 104.

¹⁰¹ Hancock, p. 4.

¹⁰² Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. by Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 163.

¹⁰³ Black, p. 77.

world of exchange.’¹⁰⁴ Captain Sholto’s apartments in Henry James’s *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) suggest that ‘there was not a country in the world he did not appear to have ransacked’, acting as a marker of his imperial past.¹⁰⁵ In *Howard’s End* (1910), E. M. Forster indicates Mr Wilcox’s colonial past through his domestic interior with linguistic economy; his rooms, we are told, ‘admitted loot’, suggesting that after the turn of the century, collecting had firm and embarrassing connotations with the reach of Victorian imperialism.¹⁰⁶ In the final years of the nineteenth century, collectors are frequently depicted as in the grip of a decadent aestheticism that both encompasses and exceeds this material imperialism. The figure of the collector-aesthete is familiar to all readers of late Victorian fiction; the protagonist of Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) descends into ‘[t]he worship of the senses’, gathering around him a narcissistic world of objects which cuts him off from human contact and results in both moral and physical degradation.¹⁰⁷ The book which inspired Wilde, Joris-Karl Huysmans’ *Against Nature* (1884) similarly depicts a collector whose revelry in objects and sensation is indulged without end.¹⁰⁸ The book caused a sensation when it was issued, and Huysmans’ protagonist was roundly condemned for his material excesses. Of course, literary satires of monomaniac collectors have a legacy which reaches back into the eighteenth century, and Victorian portrayals draw on a long literary and cultural tradition of suspicion toward those who accumulate wealth, knowledge and objects.¹⁰⁹ The collectors who compiled cabinets of curiosity were subject to many of the same criticisms that are later levelled at Victorian collectors - their collections were ostentatious, encouraged wanton consumption, or represented mere jumbles of ideas with no sense of a unifying

¹⁰⁴ Julia Prewitt-Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*, (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 230.

¹⁰⁶ E. M. Forster, *Howard’s End* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1992), p. 170.

¹⁰⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 150.

¹⁰⁸ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Benedict discusses much of this tradition, including Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, Shadwell’s *Virtuoso*, Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (pp. 25-70).

narrative.¹¹⁰ The moral ambiguity of collectors meant that they were ‘sometimes heroized, sometimes derided, and sometimes both within the same moment of culture and within the same imaginative work’.¹¹¹ But by the late nineteenth century, much of that heroization has fallen away. Imaginative renderings of collecting tended to emphasise its deleterious effects on the morals, bodies, and relationships of its practitioners.

Undoubtedly, new impetus was given to the criticism of collectors by the rise of museum culture, which set the standard for collecting and how it might be usefully pursued. Russell Belk suggests that ‘[t]he tendency to disparage collectors as somehow aberrant probably derives in part from the defining principle of collecting that objects be removed from their utilitarian (rational) intent.’¹¹² It has been frequently noted that the assignation of new, non-functional meanings is an intrinsic part of collecting; Benjamin writes that collectors have ‘a relationship to objects which does not emphasise their functional, their utilitarian value’,¹¹³ and Jean Baudrillard argues in his influential essay ‘The System of Collecting’ that ‘[p]ossession cannot apply to an implement...[r]ather it applies to that object once it is *divested of its function and made relative to a subject*.’¹¹⁴ As Richard Marsh’s collector Mr Pugh observes, ‘[a]sk a china maniac to let you have afternoon tea out of his Old Chelsea, and you will learn some home truths as to the durability of human friendships.’¹¹⁵

Collections are sites in which the use-value of objects is suspended, and collectors are invested with the power ‘to invent other utilities or rationales for possessing these objects

¹¹⁰ See Benedict, pp. 71-76.

¹¹¹ Benedict, p. 1.

¹¹² Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. viii.

¹¹³ Benjamin, p. 62.

¹¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Collecting’, in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner & Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24 (p. 7).

¹¹⁵ Marsh, pp. 7-8. Indeed, in 2014 Chinese collector Liu Yiqian sparked outrage after drinking tea from a Ming-dynasty porcelain chicken-cup which he had just bought for nearly £25 million. In response to his many detractors, he responded ‘I just wanted to see how it felt.’ See Chen, Te-Ping and Olivia Geng, ‘Chinese Art Collector Stirs Pot with Sip of Tea from \$36-million Cup’, China Real Time Report, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 2014
<<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/07/21/art-collector-stirs-pot-with-sip-of-tea-from-36-million-cup/>> [accessed 15 September 2015] (para 10 of 11).

within the logic and unity of the collection.’¹¹⁶ In the case of the institutional collecting practiced by Victorian museums, the rationale for the assembling of objects was clear – the refinement of public taste, the improvement of public morals, and the intellectual development of the nation. Objects in these public collections might have been ‘divested of their functions’ but they were still socially productive. Private collectors, however, removed objects from their ‘utilitarian intent’ without apparently making them useful again. Thus, as Belk suggests, they effect the semantic movement of objects from the rational to the irrational realm. Collecting always involves the reassigning of meanings to things, and nineteenth-century cultural anxieties about collectors, as this thesis explores, frequently foreground the possibilities inherent in the misapplication of this power.

That this removal of objects from utility was a source of anxiety in Victorian culture is suggested by how often the activities of collectors in fiction are opposed with socially productive labour. In an 1899 short story by H. D. Lowry, for example, a collector, Mr Denniss, is rewarded with early retirement by the benevolent firm at which he has spent his life working as a clerk.¹¹⁷ Whilst his peers ‘become particularly depressed’ at being forced to retire from industry, Denniss ‘gave himself up with all his heart to [his] Collection.’¹¹⁸ After falling ill he loses his collection to the wiles of an unscrupulous relative and becomes ‘one of the most pathetic figures London holds’.¹¹⁹ The story explicitly contrasts his collecting with his useful working life, positioning the former as an asocial and cyclical activity: after the collection is dispersed, Denniss spends his days trawling London salerooms and auction-houses fruitlessly attempting to reassemble it. George Eliot’s sickly Edward Casaubon from 1874’s *Middlemarch* is a particularly tragic example of the unproductive collector; so absorbed does he become by his attempts to complete the compilation of documents for the preparation of his encyclopaedic but hopelessly

¹¹⁶ Belk, p. viii.

¹¹⁷ H.D. Lowry, ‘The Collector’s Tragedy’, *The Idler*, 15 (1899), 630-36.

¹¹⁸ Lowry, pp. 632, 634.

¹¹⁹ Lowry, p. 636.

outdated 'Key to all Mythologies' that his 'ardent labour all in vain' causes his health and relationships to degrade.¹²⁰ Will Ladislav describes him as a 'dried-up pedant', an 'elaborator of small explanations about as important as the surplus stock of false antiquities kept in a vendor's back chamber',¹²¹ although to the reader Casaubon's pointless toil appears more tragic than monstrous. These fictional figures provide a striking contrast with the idealised image of the miniaturised museum curator suggested by Victorian guidebooks and manuals: the happy, productive and diligent collector belonged to the realm of the useful and rational.

While I acknowledge, therefore, the importance of imperial and aesthetic contexts for understanding portrayals of collecting in the nineteenth century, I further propose that examining where collecting deviated from useful museum display must prove a fruitful enquiry if we are to better understand how the practice could be so freely encouraged and yet continually derided in print culture. To this end, I identify two common criticisms, sometimes implicit, and sometimes overt, in Victorian portrayals of deviant collectors – that they got 'too close' to their objects, and that they collected 'too much.' Collections which crossed these boundaries ceased to be useful. Exploring the wider meanings attached to these limits in several facets of nineteenth-century material culture is the purpose of the following six chapters. This is what makes studying the conceptual boundaries of appropriate collecting so valuable: they tell us so much about the wider values of the society which attempts to enforce them. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal write that

collecting can...attempt to challenge the norm, and cock a snook at the accepted patterns of knowledge into whose regulative frame the interests and the energies of the world have been coralled. Outside the boundaries of social recognition

¹²⁰ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 222.

¹²¹ Eliot, p. 205.

arises the myth of the pioneering, the experimental collector whose vocation may be to parody orthodox connoisseurship, to challenge the expectations of social behaviour, even to construct a maverick anti-system.¹²²

To do justice to the innovation and idiosyncrasies of Victorian collectors we ought not to look solely to marketplaces or institutional cultures when we seek to understand their motives and practices. Rather, this thesis takes as its focus how collections could accommodate fluid understandings of the relationships between objects and subjects. It seeks to show how the workings of affect and imagination were intimately tied up with collecting practices in the Victorian period. It also suggests that 'collecting' was diffuse in its manifestations and that examining practices and modes which were excluded from that category can help us to better understand how people experienced and communicated with objects. Susan Pearce recognises that there were, of course, collecting habits which did not fit the 'strenuousness' of nineteenth-century museum culture: '[o]ne of the long-term characteristics of the collecting habit is its ability to carry on quite happily into a new generation modes of operation which belong to the previous generation, or generations... collectors themselves seem quite untroubled by this; indeed they have frequently seemed to glory in their archaism'.¹²³ The dual focal points of this thesis, derived as they are from Victorian culture's own renderings of erring collectors, provide a way of structuring this enquiry into the peripheries of collecting. Understanding the limits of institutionalised knowledge helps to identify the collectors who acted as outliers and anomalies – some with a preference for earlier modes but some with an eye on the horizon. Collecting in the nineteenth century could offer a means to explore relationships with objects outside of museums, and the points of departure for the remainder of this thesis constitute two of the moments at which collectors seem to depart from the pedagogical strictures of those institutions – when they get too close to their collections, and when they collect too much.

¹²² Elsner and Cardinal, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹²³ Pearce, p. 133.

Part 1

‘Too Close’: The Collector’s Touch

Introduction

Tucked away in a box in the Cuming Museum archive on the Walworth Road, Southwark, London, is a small bundle of five or six gradually rotting petals. Nestled amongst cotton fibre packing, inside a small wooden box, they are slowly browning and crisping, becoming more delicate with each passing year. As a botanical specimen, they are entirely unremarkable, being

ordinary petals of balsam, a plant commonly found in Britain and regarded as an insidious and persistent weed. Aesthetically, they are not particularly pleasing, and they provide no richer subject for the artist’s pen than any other decomposing vegetation might do. They have been a part of the Cuming collection since 1875 when Henry Cuming picked them up from the ground, possibly stowing them temporarily in his pocketbook for transportation, as he was wont to do with botanical finds, and took them home to attend to their careful preservation and labelling. A note in his hand, tucked inside the box, informs us of their significance:

Balsam. One of the Flowers thrown before the Princess of Wales & on which She stepped after witnessing a Supper at Christ’s Hospital. March 11 1875. (Picked up by H.S.C.)¹



Figure 6. Photograph of balsam petals collected by Henry Cuming. Cuming Museum object inventory number C10653.

¹ Object label, C10653. London, Cuming Museum.

The label remains carefully stored with the box, for without the brief story that it tells, the petals have no discernible value. If they were to be separated from the label, no degree of observation or analysis of their material form could suggest the reason for their presence in the collection. They would become, as the documentation category of Southwark Collections digital museum management system currently understands and entitles them, mere 'vegetal remains'.

This designation is completely at odds with how Henry Cuming understood the objects' meaning. For him, the petals provided a tangible material link to the Princess Alexandra: they are the flowers, his label notes, 'on which She stepped'. He collected many other items related to celebrated religious, royal or political figures: a phial containing a fragment of the wedding cake of the Prince and Princess of Wales', from 1863; a scrap of velvet used to cover the coffin of the unfortunate Queen Caroline, dated 1821; shoes reputed to have been worn by Queen Anne; a lock of hair taken from the head of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1761 by a Mrs. Hetherington, passed on to Henry by the granddaughter of that woman in 1873; a tooth from the body of King Alphonso VI of Portugal, taken from his grave in 1833; a cut glass chandelier drop said to have been struck from Bonaparte's coffin, and a portion of an iron cramp from Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey, to name just a few.² Where these items feature in the Cumings' unfinished manuscript catalogue, they are listed as 'memorials of events'.³ Henry understood the significance of these objects, not in terms of their material properties, but in terms of their associations, their ability to act as markers for particular events or people. The clinical contemporary heading, 'vegetal remains' is a

² The funerary items associated with Bonaparte and Chaucer are both mentioned in the manuscript catalogue compiled by Henry but their whereabouts is currently unknown. The remaining items remain extant in the collection but are not listed in the manuscript catalogue, although most have labels written in Henry's hand which offer an explanation of their provenance. They have subsequently been allocated catalogue numbers by Southwark Council museum staff, which are as follows: C10613 (wedding cake); C10597 (velvet); C02264 and C02265 (shoes); C10563 (tooth); C04882 (hair). These can be used to locate the items on the Southwark Collections online database, www.southwarkcollections.org.uk.

³ [Henry Syer Cuming], manuscript catalogue, [n.d.] London, Cuming Museum, MS TN07894.

striking marker of the multiple valencies that objects can have, and how those meanings can be variously silenced or amplified in museum settings.

The multiplicity of meanings that objects might contain and transmit troubled Victorian museum administrators and curators, who used display and labelling in order to corral them into a particular narrative. Peter Schwenger has described the chasm which always exists between subjects and objects thus; '[p]ossession is the preoccupation and pride of the subject, but not of the object, which is totally indifferent to the subject's notions of ownership. That indifference allows the object continually to slip out of any order that claims to explain it – economic, symbolic, psychoanalytic.'⁴ It is this slipperiness which means that the viewer or reader of any given cultural text can destabilise the meaning that was meant to reside in the semiotic sequence of objects. Meaning is located, therefore, outside the object, somewhere between the object itself and the observer.⁵ The meaning of museum artefacts, then, despite the efforts of the nineteenth century's museum pioneers, was never entirely under administrators' control, as Sam Alberti suggests; '[h]owever didactic and interpreted an exhibition, responses were a combination of that which was elicited by the display and that which came from within the visitor —things remembered and felt.'⁶ Alberti's work on what he calls 'museum affect' traces how visitors to museums brought their own histories and emotions to bear on museum displays and shows how objects continued to be affective even in tightly-controlled and didactic museum settings. This semantic instability of objects enables collectors to subvert the project of meaning-making at work in the museum, using their own collections to explore new approaches to the thing and new ways of understanding its relation to the world and to other objects.

⁴ Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 79.

⁵ For a demonstration of this see Susan M. Pearce, 'Objects as Meaning: Or Narrating the Past' in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. by Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 19-29.

⁶ Samuel J.M.M. Alberti, 'Objects and the Museum', *Isis*, 96:4 (2005), 559-71 (p. 569).

The first chapter of this section explores how nineteenth-century museum culture carried out the silencing of such approaches through the suppression of one particular mode of sensory encounter with material objects – the sense of touch. Frequently for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century museum visitors whom Alberti discusses, it is illicit touch that initiates their affective encounters with museum objects. Chapter One establishes how ocularcentrism burgeoned in Victorian museums, part of a wider culture of vision which has been understood as a defining feature of modernity. It demonstrates how the mode of perception intrinsic to museum settings was closely bound to their pedagogical purpose, and a desire on the side of administrators and legislators to ensure that the museum was imparting the ‘right’ messages. ‘Useful’ collecting was determined by the conditions under which the collection might be said to provide useful instruction, and museums strove to deliver this instruction through visual display. This required, it is argued, a disciplining of the body, and particularly of touch, its most diffuse sensory mode. The privileging of the disembodied eye in fictionalised idealised museum encounters is shown to be an important condition under which the accusation ‘too close!’ came to be levelled at collectors in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Chapter One concludes by suggesting that touch’s banishment from museum settings was not an accident but a conscious strategy with the purpose of suppressing the ability of touch to create affective relationships, imaginative encounters, and intimate connections with historically or temporally distant people.

The reconfiguration of Henry’s balsam petals in collection documentation, from a material form of memory to a botanical specimen, is reflective both of the collection’s move from a private into a public arena, in which its objects were supposed to act as lessons, and a wider historical change in how knowledge was produced and organised: the move from curiosity to taxonomical systems of categorisation. But the semantic reassignment of the balsam petals is also indicative of a further way in which touch was banished from museum settings, because, as relics, they derived their power from physical contact with

Princess Alexandra. Relics are items which gain their significance through metonymy. They are objects, perhaps fragments of objects, which through close physical proximity are linked with a celebrated event or person. They both implicate the tactile, through their intimate association with the body, and invite it, for, as chapter two explores, it is only by touching that their unique materiality can be confirmed. Touch is the sensory mode best suited to their comprehension, and by this same virtue they became inimical to late nineteenth-century positivist historiography; the history of the banishment of touch from the museum is also, necessarily, the history of the banishment of the relic. The second chapter of this section, therefore, goes on to further explore how touch's power as a tool for historical inquiry was understood in the nineteenth century through a study of relic culture. It picks up the thread of this introduction by discussing further relics of the Cuming collection and the wider context of imaginative antiquarian engagement with the relics of the past. It also situates collecting's emergence as a popular practice as part of a spectrum of Victorian cultural activities which all derived their popularity and significance from a shared understanding of the operations of material memory. I explore how things carrying the traces of historical hands remained a significant source of interest for collectors, despite their marginalisation in museum contexts. I consider how collectors in the nineteenth century valued touch as a discriminatory tool and as a means of forging imaginative connections with the pasts and peoples connected with their objects, and how relics were particularly suggestive and potent gateways for these relationships.

In an 1875 article which roundly condemns collectors for a variety of sins, including mercenariness, competitiveness, and finding pleasure 'in the mania for collecting, not in the collection itself', an anonymous author for *The Graphic* mocks the suspicious bodily practices of a collector of ceramics:

There is really a very comic side to this china mania, and the spectacle of a coarse yellow mug, a little awry in shape, and daubed rather than painted, nursed in

velvet, brought out carefully, as nurse would bring in the little duke of two months' old, taken in the hand tenderly, and felt with the peculiar squeeze or fond rub with which the amateur enjoys his treasure, quite suggests the hideous pug, bestowed on a silk cushion, and pampered by his mistress.⁷

The collector's affection for his objects is figured here as an absurd lunacy made manifest by his hand. The problem is not merely that his affection is misplaced, but that his caress bespeaks an intimacy that ought to be reserved only for the living: a human infant, or, at worst, a pet dog. The collector's touch is an inappropriate perversity, bestowing upon a thing, qualities which ought to be preserved for the animate. In this 'very comic' scene, the 'morose and worn face' of a collector betrays the toll that a shared conjugal passion for ceramics has wrought: 'this unfortunate mutual taste has introduced jealousy, envy, spite; they spar over a cup and saucer more vindictively than over a baby.'⁸ The collectors, husband and wife, are too close to their things, so that affections that ought to be reserved for their human progeny are transferred onto their figurines: '[t]hey are now more interested in a pair of "Chelsea Derby" figures than in the wellbeing of little Tom and Mary.'⁹ As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, depictions of collectors in Victorian popular literature frequently focus on their misplaced affections for things, as if their proper sensibilities regarding the difference between objects and subjects were unbalanced. In the late nineteenth century, these criticisms become more commonplace, and the collector's aberrance, while continuing to be located around their preference for things over people, is increasingly inscribed corporeally – 'too close' is a warning for the body as much as for the emotions, as collectors' continued physical nearness to their objects is frequently portrayed as a factor in their monomania or misanthropy. Indeed, the nineteenth century creates many of the clichés about the collector's body and its

⁷ [Anon.] 'The China Mania', *The Graphic*, 17 April 1875, p. 379.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

abnormalities which haunt our imaginings of certain kinds of collectors even today: the virginal train-spotter, the pale and anaemic stamp collector, the unkempt and filthy hoarder. An 1867 article on book collectors which appeared in *Leisure Hour* describes a typical book collector, a bachelor, 'shabby', 'seedy' and 'slipshod', 'his lean forefinger, like the beak of a foraging crow in the furrow', darting out to select a 'possible booty'.¹⁰ Another writer claims that the 'antiquary who collects for the sake of the collection' is 'wild and uncultured, dirty and ragged from head to foot, with black nails, unshaven beard, uncombed hair, battered hat, and capacious pockets always full.'¹¹ These figures are always solitary, for collectors' affections for objects have frequently been understood, both then and now, to be at the expense of their relations with humans, despite evidence that collecting is and has historically been a social activity.¹² Richard Marsh writes his collectors Tress and Pugh as objects of ridicule, wealthy men with misdirected energies who collect for money, prestige, and for collecting itself, but primarily to outdo one another - and they, too, exhibit the bodily perversity expected of their type. In 'The Adventure of the Cabinet', Tress, on being reunited with a cabinet he had wanted to purchase but had thought lost, exclaims 'my beauty! My treasure!' whilst 'stretching out his arms to it' and speaking 'in a tone of passionate emotion', before touching it 'with the finger-tips of his right hand, as a lover might touch the soft cheek of his mistress'.¹³ His competitor Pugh, on being parted from this piece of furnishing, pleads that he 'might spend a few hours with it in silent communion, so that in solitude I might bid it a long farewell'.¹⁴ Tress and Pugh are exemplars of a particular kind of gentleman collector type common at the *fin-de-siècle*; consumed by their own powers of consumption, they care only for things, and the reflected glory of the things that they might come to possess. Their

¹⁰ [Anon.] 'Book Collectors', *The Leisure Hour*, 16 February 1867, pp. 108-09 (p. 108).

¹¹ [Anon.] 'Curiosity-Hunters', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 19 October 1839, pp. 310-11 (p. 310).

¹² See Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 230-32.

¹³ Richard Marsh, *Curios: Some Strange Adventures of Two Bachelors* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007 [originally published London: John Long, 1898]), p. 55.

¹⁴ Marsh, p. 64.

heightened sensibility to aesthetic experience, enacted through the body, situates them as relatives of the decadent figures of the Aesthetic movement. Upper-class and foppish, Tress and Pugh directly associate themselves with these aesthetes through their absorption in aesthetic concerns and sensitivity to the decorative arts; Pugh calls the cabinet ‘the thing of beauty which I loved almost as I loved my life’.¹⁵ Parodies of such figures represented their bodies as weak and frail, a corporeal rendering of their sensitive intellects, and an enaction of their feminising association with modes of consumption. Even prior to Aestheticism’s influence, this association between the collector as consumer and a weakened masculinity was evident in some portrayals; Collins’s Frederick Fairlie is a sickly, enfeebled aristocrat, whose ‘fixation with collected objects...supplants fundamental human contact.’¹⁶ Like Tress and Pugh, Fairlie is a bachelor, and the stymied development of sexuality has come to be understood as a mark of the collecting habit, such that Jean Baudrillard declares that ‘[i]nvariably it runs counter to active genital sexuality’.¹⁷ This enduring image of the collector’s impotence caused by the misdirection of affection and bodily desire toward objects rather than subjects is a Victorian legacy, and depictions of deviant collectors who got ‘too close’ to their things undoubtedly draw on the cultures of consumption and aestheticism for their power.

There is scope, however, to reorient our conversations about the Victorian collector’s deviant body to critically evaluate these enduring stereotypes. Victoria Mills, in her essay exploring the portrayal of sensory experience in depictions of bibliomania, has noted the importance of tactility to nineteenth-century bibliophiles seeking, buying and caressing their books. Her readings of bibliophilic writings identify not only collectors’ sexually inflected caressing, but also the way that such touch ‘works in tandem with other forms of

¹⁵ Marsh, p. 63.

¹⁶ Kirkby-Jane Hallum, ‘Collecting Men: Masculinity and Cultural Capital in *The Woman in White*’, *Victorian Network*, 4:1 (2012), 27-47 (p. 36).

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The System of Collecting’, in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24 (p. 9). On the realities of collectors’ sexual and social selves, see Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 227.

touch that prompt the nostalgic imagining of different kinds of queer and straight queer communities of book lovers across time.’¹⁸ Mills quotes Andrew Lang, a Scottish poet, novelist and critic who wrote several books on bibliomania, and who describes how ‘our fingers are faintly thrilled/ As we touch these books, with the far-off contact of...hands’.¹⁹ Bibliophiles, in Mills’ reading, used tactile engagement with the books they collected to position themselves as part of a community with historical precedent. This re-reading of collectors’ corporeal deviancy is a significant step in reorienting our conversations about the Victorian collector’s closeness to his things.

My reading of the collector’s deviant body suggests that any discussion of literary representations of the nineteenth-century collector’s misplaced touch must be situated in the context of restricted touch in the ideal collection, i.e. the museum. I embark on this project in chapter three of this section by considering the works of Henry James, one of the most prolific and nuanced writers of collectors of the turn of the century. I situate James’s work in the context of nineteenth-century museum culture, which was partly responsible for the construction of a sensory paradigm in which the knowledge of the feeling body was denigrated in favour of the knowledge of the seeing eye. Considering the development of James’s depictions of collectors, I suggest that his ambiguous sketches of the ethics of collecting could be due to his interest in material epistemologies and the potential that the collector’s body had to freely engage with objects outside of ocularcentric museum environments. James’s fictions might contribute and draw on a cultural panic about the collector’s body but they also register a particular attentiveness to the fluidity between the collector and their things and centre touch as a valuable way of knowing.

¹⁸ Victoria Mills, “‘Books in my Hands – Books in my Heart – Books in my Brain’: Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature’, in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 130-52 (p. 136).

¹⁹ Andrew Lang, *Books and Bookmen*, (London: Longman, Greens & Co., 1892), p. 106, quoted in Mills, p. 136.

Chapter 1 – Look But Don’t Touch: Nineteenth-Century Museums

The prohibition of touch in the museum is now so commonplace that the signs urging us not to touch exhibits would be rendered almost unnecessary if it were not for the strong and overwhelming urge that we all sometimes feel to reach out and stroke the smooth surface of a marble, a luxurious cloth, or a soft feather. As adult visitors to state galleries, museums, stately homes and religious sites, we know that we ought not give in to this sometimes viscerally felt temptation, but we still might sometimes brush our hands across a forbidden chair back, or rub a shiny nub on a bronze, when unobserved. Our tactile reticence is conditioned through repeated visits to heritage and cultural sites where we have been repeatedly told not to touch, not to sit, and to stay behind the velvet rope.¹ These rules which govern our bodies in the state’s material archive were laid down during the nineteenth century. This chapter explores how the prohibition of touch in museums was tied up with anxiety around the increasing numbers and diversity of museum visitors. It argues that we might read the banishment of touch from museum environments as closely related to these institutions’ didactic purpose, as part of their strictures on the way in which visitors were supposed to engage with and understand the world and their position in it. The glass cases of the nineteenth-century museum both performed and enhanced a way of reading art and culture which relied on the inherent superiority of the British viewer to that which was laid out for display. They ensured that an emotional distance and objective stance was maintained during museum encounters with art and historical objects by keeping the body in check. This chapter provides the historical detail of this ‘hands-off’ culture, showing how the idea of ‘useful’ collecting necessitated the display of things for visual apprehension only. It also details resistance to the hands-off

¹ On our ability to read the ‘exhibitionary script’, see Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 49.

dictum, and ends by suggesting that touch came to be associated with a subversive, affective power.

Like all the senses, touch is culturally mediated. Throughout time and across cultures, the meanings associated with the tactile sense have varied according to the values and properties associated with it. If the skin is the organ of touch, we can touch with our whole bodies; as Elizabeth Harvey has noted, 'the history of touch is shaped by [the] anomaly of its corporeal distribution, of being simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.'² Because of its diffuse nature, touch can have a plurality of meanings, even in any one culture. It has the capacity to be both sexual and indifferent, tender and violent, to denote care, love, hatred, power, communication. Anthropologists of the senses Constance Classen and David Howes have encouraged research into the historical and cultural specificity of the senses so that we might better understand that 'sensory perception is a cultural, as well as a physical, act'.³ This thesis locates itself as part of that discussion, with specific focus on the cultural formation and perception of the collector's touch in the particular historical moment of the late nineteenth century. Through a focus on this image, I attempt to delineate how sensory codes of propriety formed a part of the articulation of the limits of the appropriate relationships between humans and things at this time.

The development of Classen and Howes' sensory anthropology has had to overcome the hegemony of vision over the other senses in modernity. The view of touch as a 'lower' sense has been pervasive throughout the history of Western culture, as it has traditionally been 'associated with the body, and with those peoples imagined to live a life of the body,

² Elizabeth D. Harvey, 'The Portal of Touch', *American Historical Review*, 116:2 (2011), 385-400 (p. 385).

³ Constance Classen, 'Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses', *International Social Science Journal*, 153 (1997), 401-12 (p. 401).

rather than a life of the mind.’⁴ For Harvey, touch’s marginalisation in Western culture begins with Plato, who posited the superiority of sight because of its ability to enquire into that which is distant, making it necessary for the observance of time and hence for philosophical enquiry. Touch’s reliance on the proximity of the object of inquiry to the body, put it at the bottom of Plato’s hierarchy of the senses, and this, argues Harvey, pervades all later explorations of touch, which comes to be associated more closely with the unruly passions of the body than with the detached and reasoning mind.⁵ During the Enlightenment, vision’s status as the primary sense by which the truth of the world could be apprehended made it an intrinsic part of the process of knowing. The application of vision worked in tandem with reason for the production of knowledge about the world. Michel Foucault has characterised what he calls the modern episteme as being defined by the dominance of vision, beginning with the development of the scientific method in the sixteenth century, which took as its basis the observation of sameness and difference, and therefore the ‘*description of the visible*’.⁶ This comparative method necessitated the formation of scientific collections; bringing things together in one place allows for comparison to be based on outward characteristics, and things can literally be read against one another when assembled together. As sight became associated with science, so ‘the enquiring and penetrating gaze of the scientist became the metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge.’⁷ Vision was the primary means by which one came to know.

Arguably, however, until the mid nineteenth century, tactility still had a role to play in the creation of knowledge, as touch ‘was believed to have access to interior truths of which sight was unaware’.⁸ Certainly throughout history, touch has been conceived of as a

⁴ Constance Classen and David Howes, ‘The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts’, in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 199-222 (p. 206).

⁵ Harvey, p. 387.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 137.

⁷ Classen, p. 402.

⁸ Classen and Howes, p. 202.

‘verifying’ sense; it can perceive depth and spatiality in a way that the eye cannot. The Biblical Thomas is often cited as an early exemplar of this. Disbelieving that Jesus had risen from the grave, he verified the truth of the story through touch: ‘Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe’.⁹ Touch is proximal, it can only be deployed upon things close-by, and this lends it a confirmatory property. To say ‘I touched it’ is to declare ‘I was there’. Touch denotes presence, confirming the alignment of what touches and what is touched, both spatially and temporally. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Jonathan Crary outlines in his influential account of the status of vision, *Techniques of the Observer*, touch was understood to operate in tandem with vision; each sense could perceive some properties of which the other was unaware. The process of creating knowledge therefore required each sense to provide assistance to the other. But the period between 1810 and 1840, Crary suggests, witnessed what he calls ‘a separation of the senses’, as new economic, aesthetic, philosophical and technological ideas attributed visual experience with ‘an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability, abstracted from any founding site or referent.’¹⁰ Crary’s account does not follow touch’s status in culture after its separation from vision, a further iteration of the resultant enduring cultural hegemony of vision. It is Classen and Howes who pick up this thread, explaining that the nineteenth century cemented touch as ‘animalistic’, as ideas about the ‘baseness’ of smell and touch became embedded in early anthropological discourse, firmly lodging these modes of apprehending the world at the bottom of the culturally-determined sensory order.¹¹ Simultaneously, vision gained importance through its centrality to the scientific method and new technologies which enhanced the eye’s power. Even touch’s role as a

⁹ John 20. 25.

¹⁰ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 19, 14.

¹¹ See Classen and Howes, ‘The Museum as Sensescape’, pp. 206-11. See also Classen, ‘Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses’, and Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

subsidiary element of scientific investigation was lost. Vision was the only mode of sensory apprehension appropriate for the investigation of our world.

Vision was not only the sensory mode of scientific investigation, but also of entertainment and, crucially, capitalist display. Numerous studies have commented on the variety of forms of visual culture popular in Victorian Britain; the panorama, museum, department store, and exhibition now all make up a familiar backdrop to our conversations about nineteenth-century culture.¹² In one remarkable event, these cultural forms combined in a way that has come to define nineteenth-century commodity culture. The 1851 Great Exhibition in London's Hyde Park marks a significant moment for the understanding and appreciation of material culture in Britain. Asa Briggs writes that 'it ushered in a new period', and Thomas Richards has argued that it inaugurated a 'new way of seeing things'.¹³ Not only was the Crystal Palace itself a visually arresting spectacle, making use of glass on an unprecedented scale, but the vast array of things inside it was an optical feast. Following her visit, Charlotte Brontë described how 'the brightest colours blaze on all sides; and ware of all kinds, from diamonds to spinning jennies and printing presses, are there to be seen. It was very fine, gorgeous, animated, bewildering'.¹⁴ Hers was a common response; visitors commonly recorded feeling an overwhelming sense of wonder and awe at both the building and the seemingly endless objects of novelty and invention which were displayed within it.¹⁵ The exhibition gathered together works of craft and industry from all around the world, and displayed them in groups, according to their place of origin;

¹² See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), which takes as its subject the exhibitions, dioramas, panoramas, galleries, and museums of the first half of the nineteenth century. See also Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle 1851-1914* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990), on the ocularcentrism of commodity culture, and Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802-1856* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) on how science used popular forms of visual culture to create mass appeal.

¹³ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1988), p. 27; Richards, p. 18.

¹⁴ *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas James Wise, 4 vols (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980), vol. III, p. 240.

¹⁵ See Geoffrey Cantor, 'Emotional Reactions to the Great Exhibition of 1851', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 20:2 (2015), 230-45.

such was the number of objects presented for view that the aisles in which they were displayed stretched 'farther than the eye can reach'.¹⁶ In this way, the Great Exhibition played a pivotal role in the nineteenth-century ascendancy of commodity culture; it glorified the commodity, presenting the products of labour and industry as part of a vast visual display, with things becoming visual symbols concealing the machinations which brought them into being. *Punch's* recognition of the commodification of culture at the Exhibition prefigures Marx, asking '[s]hall we ostentatiously show off all manner of articles of comfort and luxury, and be ashamed to disclose the condition of those whom we have to thank for them?'¹⁷ The Crystal Palace and its contents were a spectacle, a feast designed very specifically for the eyes, and the impressive displays helped to cement the relationship between vision and the commodity in the mid-Victorian mind. In fact, *Punch* reported that 'there is something to regale all the senses in the Exhibition – excepting perhaps, the sense of touch'.¹⁸

Museums took their cues from commodity culture and put their objects behind glass.¹⁹ In art museums, velvet ropes were introduced to ensure an appropriate distance was always maintained between viewer and viewed. 'Over the course of the nineteenth century', Sam Alberti writes, 'accepted museum practice in the arts and sciences was geared toward encouraging particular codes of appropriately visual, silent, and hands-off behaviour.'²⁰ Objects and artworks in the museum were presented to be consumed with the eyes, not to be caressed, tasted, used or toyed with, and so 'Victorian collections were gradually removed from tactile range.'²¹ This was in marked contrast to Renaissance cabinets of curiosity, which invited the touch of the hand; Bann writes that 'the general prohibition on

¹⁶ Horace Greel, 'The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons: A Lecture' (1852), quoted in Richards, p. 27.

¹⁷ [Anon.], 'Pictures for the Exhibition of Industry', *Punch*, 1 February 1851, p. 42.

¹⁸ [Anon.], 'The Front Row of the Shilling Gallery', *Punch*, 28 June 1851, pp. 10-12 (p. 11).

¹⁹ Julia Noordegraaf, *Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, & NAI Publishers, 2004), p. 47.

²⁰ Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, 'The Museum Affect: Visiting Collections of Anatomy and Natural History', in *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*, ed. by Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 371-403 (p. 387).

²¹ Alberti, p. 385.

touching the objects in a modern [museum] display is particularly at odds with a practice which must have depended on the passing of small items from hand to hand.²² Of course, cabinets of curiosity were not public spaces in the same way that the museum came to be in nineteenth-century Britain, and this is the crucial difference. Some degree of tactile interaction with objects was permitted in museums prior to the nineteenth century, as Classen and Howes have shown, although the extent to which this mode of appreciation was determined by status is the subject of some debate.²³ But it was the new public nature of the state's collections which occasioned particular debates about, and changes to, the ways that they ought best to be displayed and appreciated.

The use of visual display was linked to an increasing awareness of the pedagogical potential of museums; Philip Fisher notes that the development of the museum depended upon the principle of 'spatial display as a form of education'.²⁴ Museums were the logical correlates of the science of comparison at an institutional level, bringing objects together in collections where they could be examined and displayed in relation to one another. Since the primary pedagogical tool of the museum was visual display, the position of an object within a group or sequence could have great impact on how it, and its relation to the world, was understood by visitors. The principles of museum display, therefore, generated much debate throughout the nineteenth century.²⁵ The 1830s display of the National Gallery, which grouped artworks based on size and symmetry to create an aesthetically pleasing arrangement, was disparaged in the mid nineteenth century by reformers including John Ruskin who favoured a chronological hang, reflecting the

²² Bann, 'Return to Curiosity', pp. 123-24.

²³ Classen and Howes, 'The Museum as Sensescape'. For an important counter to Classen and Howes, see Fiona Candlin, 'Museums, Modernity and the Class Politics of Touching Objects', in *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*, ed. by Helen J. Chatterjee (Oxford: Berg, 2008), pp. 9-20.

²⁴ Philip Fisher, 'The Future's Past', *New Literary History*, 6:3 (1975), 587-606 (p. 590).

²⁵ See Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2004).

growing recognition of the gallery as a pedagogical space.²⁶ Helen Rees Leahy notes that '[t]he growing interest in the educational potential of the art museum became evident in the (re)organisation of many museums on systematic and pedagogical principles from the 1850s onwards.'²⁷ Narratives of development and progress, therefore, could be embedded within the display principles of museum collections of various kinds, including natural history, ornamental art and ethnographic material. In his study of how Darwinian ideas filtered into late nineteenth-century museum displays, Arthur MacGregor has described how 'the more benign, progressionist view of evolution' was taken up both in the cultural consciousness, which was primed for it through preexisting, Lamarckian ideas about 'progress', and in other scholarly disciplines like anthropology and archaeology which in the 1860s were just beginning to find their feet.²⁸ Although, as MacGregor notes, the specificities of Darwin's idea of natural selection did not really make their way into the displays of the British Museum's Natural History arm at South Kensington until the late 1880s, pseudo-Darwinian ideas about progress certainly informed the collecting activity of a large number of Darwin's contemporaries across disciplines, so that both collecting policies and display principles in the 'human' sciences were informed by a particularly Victorian idea of 'progress'.²⁹

The perceived authority of the museum can imbue its story with a teleological inevitability. Stephen Bann notes that the 'normalization of space through the chronological hang and the notion of the national school, seems to aspire to the Utopia of a display without an author [so that] authority is invested in the objectivity of History itself'.³⁰ Museums are powerful ways to display and perpetuate a positivist history –

²⁶ This actually occurred at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857 before it was put into practice at the National Gallery; see Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies*, p. 52.

²⁷ Rees Leahy, p. 59.

²⁸ Arthur MacGregor, 'Exhibiting Evolutionism: Darwinism and Pseudo-Darwinism in Museum Practice after 1859', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 21:1 (2009), 77-94 (p. 78).

²⁹ MacGregor argues that Darwin's theories were not fully realised in museum displays until the first decade of the twentieth century.

³⁰ Bann, 'The Return to Curiosity', p. 123.

indeed they are a powerful way of rendering the very idea of history itself. Duncan and Wallach suggest that 'without the museum, the discipline of art history...would be inconceivable' because of the power of the medium of visual display to convey ideas of development and difference.³¹ Jenny Walklate's recent work into how contemporary museum settings employ different kinds of narrative techniques in their displays recognises the power that display has to tell certain stories and conceal others entirely. Walklate's study of the 'unidirectional story' on display in Oxford's Museum of Natural History powerfully suggests how 'the display of stories in such enclosed and directive ways enhances their status as fact, and thereby the authority of the institution displaying them; even if representing the views of only one group of people or one individual'.³² 'Linear narratives', she writes, 'are riddled with elisions', but imply the existence of 'a connected, causal, universal history ranging from ancient times to the present'.³³ Such display, for Walklate, makes the museum's narrative seem 'non-negotiable'.³⁴ Thus the ordering of display which was becoming more common in the nineteenth century is part of a larger historicism which entailed the ordering and rationalizing of both history and geography to corral them into an imperially inflected vision of 'progress'.

Annie Coombes has detailed the importance and centrality of museums and exhibitions to the racialised assumptions about Africa in the nineteenth century and beyond, describing how 'exhibitions which featured any representation of the colonies were a powerful means of ensuring the longevity of a residual scientific racism long after this had been discredited in academic scientific circles'.³⁵ That such display continued to influence popular thinking even after it had been discredited at a fundamental level is testament to

³¹ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History*, 3:4 (1980), 448-74 (p. 456).

³² Jenny Walklate, 'Timescapes: The Production of Temporality in Literature and Museums' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2012), p. 143.

³³ Walklate, pp. 137-38.

³⁴ Walklate, p. 144.

³⁵ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 63.

its power. Coombes has carefully unpacked the dense and abundant literature around African art during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, to show how assumptions about the inherent superiority of white British people influenced museum policy and display. She has shown that the ubiquity of exhibitions meant that the public were saturated with the kinds of narratives on display in these arenas; '[d]egeneration and other racialised assumptions', she writes, 'underpinned the categories and descriptive processes for classifying ethnographic collections, and thus their conception by the museum-going public'.³⁶ Coombes suggests that in the case of the Horniman museum, which contained a mixture of natural history and ethnographic specimens, although the display principles were unsystematic and although 'little could be claimed by way of classification in any sense that might be deemed scientific, the middle-class viewer was too thoroughly steeped in evolutionary doctrines in relation to such material to avoid their association with any interpretation of the displays'.³⁷ Imperial narratives were certainly central to the British Museum's displays by 1895; a visitor following the 'Guide to the Exhibition Galleries' would 'trace a story...passing from Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt through Greece and Rome before moving onto the great empires of the modern world, ending with Great Britain'.³⁸ Museums were sites in which the imperialist agenda could be embedded into what Victorian Britons learned about race, geography and ethnography, and thus were sites 'of a symbolic transaction between the visitor and the state'.³⁹ Visual display was central to the museum's ability to act in this way. Victorian display methods, Tony Bennett has influentially argued, gave rise to what he calls the 'exhibitionary complex' – a state in which the gaze of the viewer is elided with, and indeed becomes indistinguishable from, the gaze of power. Offering up objects visually, Bennett argues, enabled the ruling powers to 'inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by

³⁶ Coombes, p. 43.

³⁷ Coombes, p. 116.

³⁸ Stephen D. Arata, 'Object Lessons: Reading the Museum in *The Golden Bowl*', in *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. by Alison Booth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 199-229 (p. 227).

³⁹ Duncan and Wallach, p. 457.

placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own'.⁴⁰ Thus, at the same time that museums presented their Victorian visitors with objects they had never encountered before, these presentations emphasised difference and distance above similarity and sympathy, and inducted the Victorian Briton into a position of power over those whom they encountered through museum objects. Visual display was an integral part of this process. As Isobel Armstrong has noted, a glass case is 'both *medium and barrier*'; the 'hiatus of the window dramatizes the uneven relation of subject and object'.⁴¹ The glass cases which became ubiquitous in museums in the second half of the nineteenth century, then, served to amplify the power relations inherent in the gaze.

Commonly we understand the restriction of touch in museum settings as related to the cumulative, damaging effects of touch on historic objects, and undoubtedly such concerns played a part in debates about display for Victorians too. As museums extended their opening hours museum-going became a pursuit for the masses and visitor numbers increased – municipal museums in Derby, Liverpool and Nottingham were receiving at least 4000 visitors a week by the 1880s, with Birmingham Art Gallery recording an astonishing 18,000 visitors a week in 1888.⁴² Clearly such numbers required that the demands of access be balanced with those of conservation, and indeed the need to safeguard artefacts from damage and wear was frequently raised in discussions around the location and display of the national collections in London. A series of exchanges recorded in the minutes of various Select Committees on the national collections are illuminating on the subject of dirt and damage. Edmund Oldfield, curator of antiquities at the British Museum, observed in 1853 that the crowds coming to the museum 'deposit dirt on the surface' of the antiquities, by the dust they occasion, and 'from the animal heat and

⁴⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 95.

⁴¹ Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 7.

⁴² Kate Hill, "Roughs of Both Sexes": The Working Class in Victorian Museums and Art Galleries', in *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City Since 1850*, ed. by Simon Gunn and Robert John Morris (London: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 190-203 (p. 192).

moisture arising from the great crowds.’⁴³ Of the proposal that some of the museum’s antiquities should be moved into the suburbs, away from the smog and smoke of central London, Oldfield concedes that such ‘an evil’ could be tolerated, on the grounds of conservation concerns, despite the impact that a move might have on public access to the collections. Clearly he was struggling with a problem which still plagues museum professionals today – how to strike the balance between conservation and access. But Oldfield’s testimony to the committee, like much of the parliamentary discussion around access, is inflected with class-based alarm. The ‘animal heat and moisture’ that arises from the public, he says, can be perceived ‘much more after Easter Monday and Whit Monday’, days when the working classes had an opportunity to attend.⁴⁴ Similar observations had been made by a select committee witness three years earlier, who had stated that the National Gallery’s collections suffered from ‘the very bad atmosphere, and the quantity of dust and dirt that rises up, open as it is to all classes.’⁴⁵ Such views were not universally held; the sculptor Richard Westmacott gave evidence in 1853 that ‘the strongest manifestation of a desire for information, and a great deal of good behaviour, from a very low class of people’ was always observable at the British Museum.⁴⁶ But overwhelmingly, the working classes were a troubling presence in museum settings, an opinion shared by both witnesses to the Select Committee and the popular press; the *Illustrated London News*, writing in 1851 of visitors to the Great Exhibition, declared the working classes to be ‘more prone to touch, feel, and finger the goods than they ought to have been’.⁴⁷ Inevitably, touching, feeling, fingering bodies that were understood as problematic in museum settings were working class. Appropriate museum behaviour did not include idle chit chat, eating, or gawping, all offences of which the working classes were accused – their

⁴³ *Testimony before the Select Committee on the National Gallery*, excerpted in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* ed. by Jonah Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 141-59 (p. 149).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Select Committee on the National Gallery (1850), Report with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix, London, p.619, quoted in Candlin, ‘Museums, Modernity and the Class Politics of Touching Objects’, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Testimony before the Select Committee on the National Gallery*, p. 156.

⁴⁷ *Illustrated London News*, 31 May 1851, p. 501; quoted in Richards, p. 37.

propensity to picnic was a particular cause of alarm.⁴⁸ Thus, Fiona Candlin and Kate Hill have both persuasively argued that moves to discipline the body in the nineteenth-century museum were occasioned specifically by working class bodies.⁴⁹ Their failure to adhere to the corporeal codes of the museum is understood as a failure to suppress their sensuality; bodies are felt against other bodies, they eat, react, secrete tears or sweat – hence Oldfield’s reference to ‘animal heat’. The working classes in museum spaces did not enact the disembodiment considered necessary for an intellectual engagement with the things on display; they performed their embodiment too thoroughly. The suppression of touch in museums, then, can be considered as more than a byproduct of modernity and the hegemony of vision in culture, but as also a hugely class-inflected perceptual move.

Classen and Howes understand the suppression of touch in the museum as a direct result of rising visitor numbers, coupled with the simultaneous devaluation of touch itself, so that ‘the restriction of touch in the museum was not considered to be any great loss. The important thing was to see.’⁵⁰ But there was public resistance to the dictum ‘don’t touch’. As Helen Rees Leahy succinctly puts it in her recent book *Museum Bodies*, ‘knowing what to do in principle is not the same as having the desire or energy to do it in practice’.⁵¹ Although, clearly, individual instances of visitors touching objects are difficult to find in the archive, Sam Alberti highlights several occasions where the illicit touch of the untrained visitor is recorded: anatomical collections in Florence at the end of the eighteenth century had to be protected from visitors handling the wax genitalia; an alluring female figure at an 1859 anatomy exhibition so moved the poet and civil servant Arthur Munby that he, in knowing violation of the museum’s rules, ‘lifted the stiff hand, &

⁴⁸ See Hill, ‘Roughs of Both Sexes’, p. 196.

⁴⁹ Hill, ‘Roughs of Both Sexes’; Candlin, ‘Museums, Modernity and the Class Politics of Touching Objects’.

⁵⁰ Classen and Howes, p. 208.

⁵¹ Rees Leahy, p. 7.

touched the dusty hair'.⁵² Kate Hill suggests that frustration with the bodily codes of the museum can be read in the decrease in rowdy behaviours in museum settings toward the end of the century. Unlike Tony Bennett, who reads this reduction in aberrant corporeality as indicative of the success of visual culture at modifying visitor behaviour, Hill reads the reduction in reports of poor museum behaviour alongside the general decline in visitor numbers which museums saw at the end of the century and suggests that 'rowdiness decreased because rowdy people ceased to go to museums and galleries...as visitors fall off it is the middle classes who remain'.⁵³ Would-be museum-goers simply took up other cultural forms which better accommodated their sociability and embodiment.

Articulations of the frustration caused by prohibitive codes of conduct in museums can be read not only in changes to visitor demographics and individual instances of rebellion. They also appear in Victorian literary culture and are notably the subject of an 1858 article by Charles Dickens in *Household Words*, 'Please to Leave your Umbrella'.⁵⁴ The narrator of this short essay visits Hampton Court Palace, which at this time housed public galleries, and was a place so formal that even the gardens had 'court-suits on'.⁵⁵ On entering, and after leaving his wet umbrella with a guard, he notes the 'dingy' interior and its 'dreary' contents, yet, taken in by the presentation of the gallery as an idyllic space, imagines the possibility of a peaceful life spent within the Palace, where he would be unencumbered by the troubles he might face outside of its walls. He happily declares that even after death, 'our ghosts should make of this dull Palace the first building ever haunted happily!'⁵⁶ Yet in a moment, significantly a moment in which he is about to reach out and touch a framed picture, he is 'recalled to [his] senses'. The rooms are indeed queer and dingy, the art is

⁵² Alberti, pp. 384-85.

⁵³ Hill, 'Roughs of Both Sexes', pp. 198-99. On the exhibitionary complex, see Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

⁵⁴ [Charles Dickens], 'Please to Leave Your Umbrella', *Household Words*, 17:423 (1 May 1858), pp. 457-59.

⁵⁵ Dickens, p. 457.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

merely 'a stagnant pool of blacking in a frame'.⁵⁷ He starts as he realises that his umbrella is not the only thing left at the door. He has also relinquished his personal taste and judgement, 'all the best bumps in my head. Form, colour, size, proportion, distance, individuality, the true perception of every object on the face of the earth or the face of the Heavens'.⁵⁸ As a visitor, he must not heed his own perceptions, or indeed his own opinions: 'please to accept with this ticket for your umbrella the individual opinions of some other personage whose name is Somebody, or Nobody, or Anybody, and to swallow the same without a word of demur'.⁵⁹ Dickens compares the experience of being a gallery visitor to those of hearing a trial at the Old Bailey, or sitting in the gallery at the House of Commons, such are the rules and sanctions imposed on intellect and the creative faculties. In the gallery, he is expected to be as a blank slate, ready to be dictated to upon matters of taste; 'be so good as to leave your eyes with your umbrellas, gentlemen, and to deliver up your private judgment with your walking-sticks'.⁶⁰ The visitor is left frustrated by his experience of the exhibition. To partake in the public institution, he is asked to surrender all private judgment, and he does just what Hill suggests he might – he leaves. The moment of the turn in the narrative is significant because although most of the visitor's anger is directed toward the requirement to abandon his taste, opinions and credulity, it is recognition of the bodily restriction which sets this train of thought in motion. For Dickens's visitor, the inability to interact with exhibits in a tactile manner is symptomatic of the control exerted over visitor responses in other ways.

'Please to Leave Your Umbrella' adeptly illustrates the larger point that I wish to make, which is that the suppression of the body in the museum was not merely an inconvenience but a means of controlling public understanding of the objects on display. Without the proper training of those curators and students who might, under particular circumstances,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dickens, p. 458.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

have been permitted to handle objects, the average museum visitor was far better off, at least in the eyes of museum administrators, receiving their instruction through carefully planned display and labelling. But what was dangerous about the touch of the ordinary visitor? Fiona Candlin has persuasively argued that the suppression of touch in museum settings can be considered an attempt to shut down 'lay challenges to expert territory'.⁶¹ Candlin notes that in commentary on museum handling, from the nineteenth century to the present day, '[t]he curator's touch is perceived to be qualitatively different from that of the casual visitor.'⁶² For Candlin, the threat of the layperson's touch is that it opens up the possibility that knowledge not be bounded, which in turn threatens the very nature of the 'expertise' practised by museum curators and professionals. In her contemporary work with blind activist groups advocating for wider access to museum objects through touch, Candlin notes that tactile appreciation of aesthetic objects has been completely elided in the field of art history, so that many highly trained and expert curators today are simply unaware that tactile appreciation of the objects in their care is even possible.⁶³ For curators to acknowledge the value of touch in apprehending museum objects would be to suggest, she writes, 'that there are no fixed parameters to learning and that their authority is never an accomplished fact.'⁶⁴

If, as Candlin suggests, touching objects might constitute a threat to the curator's knowledge and hence to the narratives that museums attempt to tell, it seems inevitable that tactile apprehension of objects, except by the most highly trained or educated, was not permitted in Victorian museums. All ordinary visitors had to adhere to strict bodily

⁶¹ Fiona Candlin, 'Don't Touch! Hands Off! Art, Blindness and the Conservation of Expertise', *Body & Society*, 10:1 (2004), 71-90 (p. 73).

⁶² Candlin, 'Don't Touch!', p. 78.

⁶³ Candlin, 'Don't Touch!', p. 84.

⁶⁴ Candlin, 'Don't Touch!', p. 86. Postmodern museum display has attempted to acknowledge and confront the limits of its own authority and curatorial knowledge. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill describes an exhibition at the British Museum in which items of litter from the Bloomsbury locale were displayed alongside Egyptian artefacts with labels which described them using the detached and objective language of the museum. The absurdity of these labels, she writes, 'revealed the terse, two-dimensional, essentially useless information produced by an apparently objective and scientific approach' (Hooper-Greenhill, p. 142).

codes and leave their umbrellas, outstretched hands, and, by extension, opinions, at the door. But for curatorial staff and others in the skilled professions, the use of touch was considered an important part of professional training. The Museum of Ornamental Art, opened in 1852 by Sir Henry Cole (initially as the Museum of Manufactures), the primary aim of which was to educate artisans in good design, allowed visiting craftspeople to handle the objects on display for a small fee, on the proviso that they first washed their hands.⁶⁵ John Ruskin wrote in 1866 that educational collections of natural history should serve both the general public and the specialist student:

...while a certain part of the series of exhibited objects was permanent and not permitted to be handled, a sufficient number of inferior specimens replaceable from time to time should be kept in cabinets connected with the reading-rooms, and of these inferior specimens the curator should have the power of permitting quite free experimental use to such students as he might judge deserving of the trust.⁶⁶

Ruskin's proposal accommodates concerns about preservation (only the 'inferior' specimens to be handled) with the pedagogical usefulness of handling in a design context, but he also defers ultimate responsibility for who gets to touch to the curator. Similarly, Thomas Henry Huxley, in the same decade, objected to Richard Owen's plans for the design of the Natural History Museum galleries on the grounds that some specimens ought not to be for public consumption, but displayed in parallel handling galleries for the education of students.⁶⁷ This was comparable to medical and biological museums, one of the main purposes of which was to provide anatomy, physiology and

⁶⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 21.

⁶⁶ John Ruskin, 'On the Present State of Modern Art, with Reference to the Advisable Arrangement of a National Gallery', excerpted in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, ed. by Siegel, pp. 278-82 (p. 280).

⁶⁷ See Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 130. Huxley had originally campaigned, along with other men of science, for two museums on entirely separate sites, but Owen's plans to have students and the general public in one space were successful.

pathology students with specimens for handling and teaching.⁶⁸ It is clear that working in tandem with the eye, touching specimens was considered essential for a full education in both natural and design history. In each of these instances, the handling of objects was to work in conjunction with other specialised training which rendered the handler able to both appropriately touch the specimens and extract the right kind of information from their tactile exploration. As Tony Bennett has noted, Huxley's designs designated the curator 'the source of an absolute authority' while the public is 'denied any active role in the museum except that of looking and learning, absorbing the lessons that have been laid out before it.'⁶⁹ Whilst the issue of touching objects was contentious in the case of the layman, whose bodily presence in the museum became the object of parliamentary debate, touch was permitted, even advocated for, in the case of skilled professionals or students.

Stanley Jevons, a noted economist, published an 1883 essay reflecting on the successes and failures of the century's museum culture in which he suggested that museums were too vast and eclectic, encouraging visitors to behave as passive onlookers rather than to truly engage with the materials presented to them.⁷⁰ Jevons identifies 'the touch of the fingers' as equal to 'the glance of the eye' in gaining 'real instruction', writing that 'the purpose of a true Museum is to enable the student to see the things and realise sensually the qualities described in lessons or lectures; in short, to learn what cannot be learnt by words.'⁷¹ His writing suggests the importance of sensual encounters with objects, and considers it a failure of Victorian museums that they have thus far proved unable to provide them. We might therefore, he suggests, better conduct our sensuous investigations into geological, palæontological – in fact, all kinds of objects – at home.

⁶⁸ Alberti, p. 384.

⁶⁹ Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory*, p. 14.

⁷⁰ W. Stanley Jevons, 'The Use and Abuse of Museums', in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, ed. by Siegel, pp. 283-99.

⁷¹ Jevons, p. 291

[T]he best Museum is that which a person forms for himself...the utility of each inspection is vastly less than that which arises from the private possession of a suitable specimen which can be kept near at hand to be studied at any moment, handled, experimented and reflected upon. A few such specimens probed thoroughly, teach more than thousands glanced at through a glass-case.⁷²

Jevons argues that the personal collection offers more opportunities for learning than the public museum ever can, and he places touch at the heart of this experience. In a private collection, the collector is the sole curator, which affords them the privilege of touch, and access to what Jevons calls the 'real instruction and knowledge' that goes with it. What sort of knowledge might this be? Probably not information about an object's provenance, its age, its biochemical composition – these were and still are all things determined by the eye, and instruments like the microscope designed to enhance the eye's abilities. But, as Jevons notes, touch can enhance a sense of deep familiarity and a sense of personal connection – a child is more likely to seek out mineral specimens in a museum gallery, he writes, if they have 'diligently conned' their specimens at home, and touch is an integral part of that 'conning'.⁷³

I do not suggest that nineteenth-century collectors all gathered objects in reaction to the oppressive regime of the museum, with a tactile aim in mind, but I do not think it a conclusion too far to suggest that domestic collections allowed a negotiation of the relationships between objects and bodies which was expressly prohibited in the museum. Indeed Kate Hill has described how '[c]anonical nineteenth-century museums tried to distinguish quite clearly between people, as subjects, and things, as objects, and developed ways of handling material culture to constitute and maintain that difference' whereas

⁷² Jevons, p. 289

⁷³ Ibid.

'[m]ore popular collecting practices...did not embed such a clear distinction between bodies and things'.⁷⁴ In private collections, I argue, collectors can do justice to the 'thingness' of things, apprehend objects and material culture in their fulsome sensuality, without reducing things to mere signs, as the poetics of museum display does. This desire, of course, can only go so far; most collections, including private ones, have preservation as a central principle. There are many occasions where, as in the museum, objects are 'required to conform to the sensory order of their new home'.⁷⁵ But the collection does at the very least offer the opportunity for handling, something which the museum expressly forbids. Walter Benjamin claimed that 'collectors are beings with tactile instincts' suggesting that we might, therefore, legitimately inquire into the nature and purposes of the collector's touch in the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ An examination of their tactile tendencies can, therefore, play an important part in our reconceptualisation of the collector, and is an important point of difference if we are to consider nineteenth-century collecting practices in relation to burgeoning museum culture.

What is lost with the museum's injunction not to touch has rarely been explored.⁷⁷ As we have seen, handling for instruction was permitted in certain, quite limited, pedagogical contexts, and this would have been the means of ascertaining particular information such as how heavy an item was, how its weight was distributed, how joints or moving parts operated, how an instrument might work – all kinds of important knowledge about objects and their use and operation which must be ascertained in relation to the body.⁷⁸ But

⁷⁴ Kate Hill, 'Collecting and the Body in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Museums' in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 153-74 (p. 154).

⁷⁵ Classen and Howes, p. 210.

⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 206.

⁷⁷ See Sally MacDonald, 'Exploring the Role of Touch in Connoisseurship and the Identification of Objects', in *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* ed. by Elizabeth Pye (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), pp. 107-20.

⁷⁸ For a contemporary demonstration of how touch can facilitate a sensory analysis of objects and thus bring about new knowledge of their use and biography, see Gavin MacGregor, 'Making Sense of

touching objects also brought about the opportunity for different, less objective, kinds of 'knowledge' to be created. Just what sort of knowledge could be explored through touching is the subject of the following chapter. To consider the possibilities inherent in touch's ability to open up avenues of emotional and diffuse knowledge is to understand that the prohibition of touch was and can be used as a way to make museum visitors toe the line, to shut down the possibility of alternative knowledges, histories, and narratives being created in the museum environment. Artefacts in the national collections of nineteenth-century museums were meant to be consumed in particular ways, to tell particular stories.⁷⁹ An axe in Pitt Rivers' display was part of a narrative which demonstrated the progressive development of cutting technologies from ancient times to the present day.⁸⁰ Skulls in the African exhibition, exhibited according to who had collected them, displayed African people as trophies to be won.⁸¹ The restriction of touch in the museum, then, functions not only to safeguard the curator's professional status by preserving their tactile privileges, but to ensure that the narratives created by visual display remain hegemonic; in the case of the nineteenth-century museum, that narrative was almost always based around an idea of progress which positioned the Victorian Briton as the inevitable peak and end point. Marcia Pointon has spoken of 'the paradox of museums and archives as repositories which stage collective memory – emphasizing the passage of time in their technologies and taxonomies – but at the same time offering us objects which invite a refusal of difference, which call up a compulsion imaginatively to

the Past in the Present: A Sensory Analysis of Carved Stone Balls', *World Archaeology*, 31:2 (1999), 258-71.

⁷⁹ Kate Hill's work on municipal museums suggests that smaller institutions struggled to attain narrative cohesiveness in their galleries as limited funding meant they accepted almost anything that was thrown their way. Indeed, Hill suggests, they may have seen their role as quite different to that of larger museums. See Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity: Domestic, Familial, and Everyday "Old Things" in English Museums, 1850-1939', *Museum History Journal*, 4:2 (2011), 203-22, and 'Collecting and the Body', pp. 168-69.

⁸⁰ Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory*, pp. 55-56; Coombes, p. 118. See also David K. van Keuren, 'Museums and Ideology: Augustus Pitt-Rivers, Anthropological Museums, and Social Change in Later Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 28:1 (1984), 171-89.

⁸¹ See Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, p. 66.

bridge the gap.’⁸² It was the aim of the increasingly professionalised discourse around museum display and visiting in the nineteenth century to close those opportunities to ‘imaginatively bridge the gap’, and one of the ways that they did this was to prohibit the tactile apprehension of objects. The next chapter details how collecting offered, for some, an opportunity to put the imagination to work in closing those temporal and geographical gaps.

⁸² Marcia Pointon, 'Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body' in *Material Memories*, ed. by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 39-57 (p. 40).

Chapter 2 – ‘Touch Made Permanent’: Relics and Collecting

This chapter explores the ways in which touch offered a means for Victorian collectors to explore alternative histories and narratives around objects entirely separate from the semiological and developmental displays of the nineteenth-century museum. Examining collectors’ practices and writings, it posits the private collection as a space in which learning could be conducted through avenues other than the gaze, and without the associated power relations implicit in museum settings. It explores the proposition that touch might generate qualitatively different encounters with the material world to visual apprehension in museums, and it positions collecting amongst a wide range of cultural practices which derived their meaning and potency through the tactile, exploring what kinds of encounters with things were being warned against when the nineteenth century shouted ‘too close!’ Finally, this chapter positively appraises touch and suggests how it might complicate and enrich relationships between humans and objects.

These enquiries are not, of course, easy. Most collectors in the nineteenth century would have handled their objects at the point of collection, to clean and care for them, to rearrange their position in cabinets or drawers, perhaps even to use or play with them. But only repeated touch is inscribed on the object as patina. Lighter or less frequent touches leave no mark. How can we understand the tactile relationships between collectors and their things when touch so infrequently registers not only on objects, but in any way in the historical record? We might turn instead to the writings of collectors, both personal and public, to better understand the varied and specific meanings of touch, and indeed in what follows I do consider how touch is articulated in the correspondence and published works of collectors. But more broadly, this chapter will attempt to access touch in nineteenth-century collections through what I argue is its correspondent material form, the relic. Relics, and more specifically secular relics, are material objects and fragments

which relate not to Biblical figures but to celebrated historical people or events. They are imbued with their cognitive power through physical contact with the person or thing, and exude that power most acutely when touched. Thus the locus of their power is tactility. Handling is how such objects mean; indeed, anthropologist Jan Geisbuch has described relics as 'touch made permanent'.¹ Tracing attitudes towards relics and their display is therefore a helpful way of exploring touch's cultural inflections during this period. The continued interest of nineteenth-century collectors in possessing relics, despite the eschewal of such objects by museums, makes them a unique prism through which to understand exactly what was so threatening about the collector's body and its ability, and desire, to touch objects.

The disappearance of relics from museum settings is the material corollary of the restriction of touch in those same spaces. More broadly, it has been suggested that 'the rejection of the relic was part of the more comprehensive rejection of the "curiosity" that was central to defining the collecting of professional museums in a variety of disciplines.'² Curiosity as a mode of inquiry, as we have seen, invited and necessitated touch, but as epistemological researches changed to privilege the investigation of systems and processes, curiosity and its attendant interest in the tactile was rejected as unsystematic and unacademic. In what follows, I examine more closely the ways in which relics, and their concomitant mode of sensorial apprehension, the tactile, threatened museum narratives by enabling imaginative and sympathetic communication across spatial and temporal boundaries. This exploration takes in several popular practices which demonstrate that outside of museum settings, nineteenth-century Britain was awash with cultural forms which were contingent on a shared understanding of the affective power of the tactile. This chapter also returns to the relics which found a home in the collection of

¹ Jan Geisbuch, 'For Your Eyes Only? The Magic Touch of Relics', in *Museum Objects: Experiencing the Properties of Things*, ed. by Sandra H. Dudley (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 202-13 (p. 207).

² Teresa Barnett, *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 3.

Richard and Henry Cuming, situating the family's collecting practices amongst the burgeoning antiquarian culture of which they were a part, and suggesting that the antiquarian collector's romanticisation of relics laid them open to parody and derision in literature and culture which declared them 'too close'.

In his lucid and extensive history of the idea of communication, *Speaking into the Air*, John Durham Peters notes how the nineteenth century experienced 'unprecedented transformations in the conditions of human contact.'³ Revolutions in technology precipitated a huge rethinking of the relation of bodies to one another, and how they might communicate. The nineteenth century promised to 'burst the bonds of distance and death', through the development of new technologies of transmission and recording.⁴ Durham Peters describes the telegraph and photograph as revolutions in what he calls processes of 'space binding and time binding' – that is, they bring together that which is temporally or spatially distant, bridging chasms which had previously been considered unbridgeable.⁵ Time-binding media, such as architecture, painting, or the written word, can be experienced at two distinct points of time, so that two or more individual moments, separated by minutes, hours or perhaps years, are brought together through shared contemplation of the medium. These media were given new meaning by processes of recording such as film, the phonograph, and photograph. They were now no longer the only means by which memory might be recorded and transmitted through history. No longer was a human interlocutor necessary, with all the margin for subjectivity that necessitated, but these new technologies brought a dream of faithful recording rapidly into sharp focus. Memory, Durham Peters has it, was 'no longer tied to the mortal individual.'⁶ Likewise, the transmission of space-binding media – portable media, such as

³ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 138.

⁴ Durham Peters, p. 142.

⁵ Durham Peters, p. 138.

⁶ Ibid.

letters, which materially connect distant places – was revolutionised, and rapid communication at a great distance was all of a sudden a reality with the development of the telegraph and, later, the telephone.⁷ In cutting out the sender, be it horse, human, or pigeon, new space-binding media suggested the possibility of the transmission of information free from the burden of bodies, and of writing. That such technologies truly did imply the possibility of perfect, unhindered communication between bodies is evidenced by the reaction of newspapers to the successful laying of the first transatlantic telegraph cable in 1858: *The Times* editorialised that the effect of the new connection between Britain and America would be ‘to render hostilities between the two nations almost impossible for the future...fused together, as they now are, by this electrical agency.’⁸

I draw attention to Durham Peters’ account of revolutions in nineteenth-century technology because it provides us with the conceptual framework to better understand the potency of the relic in Victorian Britain. Relics had been prized before and continue to be to this day, but Durham Peters’ terminology offers us a way to conceive of what made the relic a particularly potent form for Victorians, who variously wished to celebrate and suppress it, as we will see. In a culture especially attuned to the potential of media to transport, but also newly aware of what is lost when the body is removed from questions of communication, relics were an older manifestation of a new set of problems and possibilities. They were a powerful medium themselves, a material form which offered the possibility of communication with the past, ‘a victory over Death and Time’.⁹ A tactile engagement with relics was, for some, a route to a communion with the past without the

⁷ See Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker, 1998).

⁸ [Anon.], [We publish to-day, the first fruits...], *The Times*, 23 August 1858, p. 6.

⁹ This description of an encounter with a deceased man’s handwriting appears in ‘Hobbies and Hobby Riders’, *The Graphic*, 31 August 1872, p. 198.

need for words or interpretation – pure transmission. This, as I explore, was part of their threatening power.

This context is significant because although the importance of secular relics has been discussed extensively with regard to the Romantic era and the influence of that period's cult of the hero and its preoccupations with immortality, fragmentation, and decay, their position in later nineteenth-century British culture is less clear.¹⁰ Whilst the developing professional language of museum display shunned secular relics, the popularity of relics and relic-collecting amongst the public showed no signs of declining. Thus, relics are, in the nineteenth century, 'either systematised in large public collections or marginalised by either being left to the auspices of popular entertainments, or existing in the private collections of enthusiasts'.¹¹ Museum historians seem to agree that relics were banished from museum displays at some point in the long nineteenth century, and although there is some disagreement about when this process began,¹² the Victorian museum was certainly an inhospitable place for relics. At the very least, museums subjected them to 'particular regimes of meaning' such as classification, cataloguing and recording, which were aimed at containing and suppressing their emotionally provocative qualities in ways which would 'underpin the prevailing epistemology of museums.'¹³ Teresa Barnett dates the rejection of the relic in American museums as an early-twentieth-century phenomenon, pointing to increased professional literature about the purpose and design of museum display which shunned relics as unacademic because of their perceived incidental nature to the facts of

¹⁰ See Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Caroline Morris, 'Biographical Objects and the Changing Rhetoric of Display in the Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century' (unpublished conference paper, 2013)
<https://www.academia.edu/4028565/Biographical_objects_and_the_changing_rhetoric_of_display_in_the_Nineteenth_and_early_Twentieth_Century> [accessed 18 January 2014], pp. 4-5.

¹² See Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet*.

¹³ Kate Hill, 'Collecting and the Body in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Museums' in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 153-74 (p. 158).

history.¹⁴ Barnett's recent study of the status of relics in America throughout the nineteenth century is a useful and thorough account of how the apparent importance or insignificance of such items is culturally constructed, and notes that US practices and perspectives were broadly reflective of European attitudes. She observes that secular relics occupied prominent positions in the displays of the Smithsonian museums right up until the end of the nineteenth century, but that after that, the position of relics in museums is plagued by tension; '[i]n its apparent triviality, its inability to offer any verifiable data about the past, the relic was positioned as the shadowy antimatter of the solidly informational historical artifact.'¹⁵ This 'apparent irrelevance to *real* history is itself,' she argues, 'a historically specific phenomenon', reflective of a new kind of historiography.¹⁶ In what follows I take up Barnett's argument about the relic's 'incidental' nature and attempt to understand its epistemological possibilities, which are located outside of rational understanding and, I argue, in its tactile possibilities. I want to examine further the implications of her brief suggestion that the new perspective on the past which condemned the relic to irrelevance was reflected in museum displays that presented relics as visual, not tactile, objects.¹⁷

The disciplining of relics in Victorian museums occurred at least in part because 'serious' institutions like the British Museum wanted to distance themselves from more sensational amusements which threatened the gravity of the whole museum agenda, irrespective of whether visitors themselves would have noted, or indeed cared about, such distinctions.¹⁸ Institutions less expressly educational in their aspect could be more lax about the boundary between titillation and instruction, and places like William Bullock's famous

¹⁴ See Barnett, pp. 163-96.

¹⁵ Barnett, pp. 2-3

¹⁶ Barnett, p. 2.

¹⁷ Barnett, p. 170.

¹⁸ Hill describes how in 'the early nineteenth century, bodily objects...became closely associated with a culture of sensational display that, while initially not separated from a scholarly approach, was by the middle of the century increasingly seen as incompatible with seriousness of purpose' (Hill, p. 156). See also Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 14-15.

museum at the Egyptian Hall, London, positively gloried in their relics' abilities to transport their visitors. The evocative qualities of Napoleon's carriage, a prize exhibit, were lauded in Bullock's 1816 advertising pamphlets: '[i]n approaching this carriage...an immediate connection is formed, with the greatest events and persons, that the world ever beheld'.¹⁹ In 1842, the carriage was purchased by Madame Tussauds, whose advertising material illustrates how relics might be understood as tawdry and unintellectual; an advertisement from the following year ghoulishly invites visitors to come and gawp at the bloodstained upholstery, and to combine their visit to the carriage with a trip to the adjacent 'Chamber of Horrors'.²⁰ These privately-run attractions are illustrative of one of the major contentions of this thesis, that, freed from the educational demands of museum display, collections were a place in which esoteric, boundary-bending collecting practices could take place. Collectors' evident ongoing interest in relics and their imaginative possibilities contrasted strongly with the Victorian museum administration's project for the pedagogical museum. Relics may no longer have been found in museum displays, but they were still finding homes in treasured private collections all over the country; an 1896 article in *Temple Bar* magazine exclaims that 'it is surprising...what people will pay for relics of various kinds', recounting in great detail the exorbitant sums many of these 'venerable and impudent absurdities' have reached at auction.²¹

This is perhaps unsurprising, given the many ways in which other forms of material memory were embedded in Victorian culture. A close relation of the 'celebrity' relics which are the concern of this chapter, Victorian mourning relics and mementoes frequently incorporated the material remains of a deceased loved one, to be worn close to the body as

¹⁹ *A Description of the Costly and Curious Military Carriage of the Late Emperor of France* (London, 1816), p. 3; p. 9, quoted in Stuart Semmel, 'Reading the Tangible Past: British Tourism, Collecting, and Memory after Waterloo', *Representations*, 69 (2000), 9-37 (p. 13). Detail of the movement and afterlife of Napoleon's carriage are given in Pascoe, pp. 85-109. On Bullock's acquisition and display of the carriage, see Michael P. Costeloe, *William Bullock: Connoisseur and Virtuoso of the Egyptian Hall: Piccadilly to Mexico (1773-1849)* (Bristol: HiPLAM, University of Bristol, 2008).

²⁰ 'Madame Tussaud's', *Theatrical Journal*, 5:212 (January 1844), p. 8.

²¹ W. Roberts, 'Some Collecting Fads', *Temple Bar* (1896), 108, pp. 235-48.

a form not only of remembrance, but also of continued corporeal presence. This practice, Deborah Lutz has recently claimed, declined after the First World War, as the corpse became medicalised and lost its enchantment, but was extremely commonplace throughout the nineteenth century.²² Queen Victoria had her children's teeth set as earrings and a brooch, but it was hair, most commonly, that was used in mourning jewellery. It could be treated and braided to form the structure of bracelets and necklaces, or set in resin or glass to be incorporated decoratively into pins or brooches. Such was the popularity of these practices in the mid- to late-nineteenth century that practical guides were produced to disseminate the knowledge necessary to produce fine hair work. These guides stressed the ability of corporeal remains to act as triggers for memory and imagination; one, published in 1871, suggests that a 'few solitary hairs...call back the dear face never more to be seen, scenes never again to be revisited, and incidents long held by the past among its own.'²³ As Marcia Pointon has elaborated in her work on Victorian hair jewellery, the tactile experience of these items was integral to their epistemology: 'touch is an important vector of memory...objects designed to be handled and worn close to the body have particular resonances in relation to the human experience of time.'²⁴ The corporeal matter, carried with or on the body, does more than 'stand in' for what is lost. Rather, by virtue of its continued existence and stubborn presence, it provides a material contiguity between past, present, and future. This fetishisation of the remains of dead loved ones was deeply embedded in Victorian death culture, Lutz suggests, but was related to, and often indistinguishable from, a broad spectrum of personal memorial practices that were common throughout the century, including 'the collecting of personal bric-a-brac that had little outward value but was more clearly linked to the body and to intimacy –

²² Lutz, p. 7.

²³ Alexanna Speight, *The Lock of Hair. Its History, Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic; with the Art of Working in Hair...* (London, 1871), p. 83, quoted in Marcia Pointon, 'Wearing Memory: Mourning, Jewellery and the Body', in *Trauer tragen - Trauer zeigen: Inszenierungen der Geschlechter*, ed. by Gisela Ecker & Maria Kublitz-Kramer (München: Fink, 1999), pp. 65-81 (p. 78).

²⁴ Marcia Pointon, "'These Fragments I have Shored against my Ruins'", in *The Story of Time*, ed. by Kristen Lippincott (London: Merrell Holberton, 1999), pp. 198-201 (p. 200).

pebbles from a favourite beach, ribbons that belonged to friends, and locks of hair.’²⁵

Following Lutz, I understand relics as part of a broad range of material memorial practices which encompasses the mementoes, keepsakes and souvenirs that privately commemorate the personal and intimate.

Clearly, however, relics are not entirely analogous to the mementoes and keepsakes described by Lutz. Rather than functioning as a memorial of an event or person actually known to the individual bearer, and experienced firsthand, they act as points of reference for historic or eminent events and people. As such, they might be understood as part of a culture of public commemoration, both ritual and material. Commemorative monuments have a similar function to personal keepsakes in relation to memory; Alois Riegl describes their role as ‘keeping particular human deeds or destinies...alive and present in the consciousness of future generations.’²⁶ They sustain collective memory, and the various myths or truths about the nation that may entail. Shared commemoration plays an important part in upholding imagined ideas about nationhood and collectivity, and where this commemoration centres around particular historical or cultural figures, partaking in commemorative activity extends the morals and values for which they stand to individuals and to the nation.

It is possible, therefore, to understand enduring nineteenth-century interest in relics as part of a culture of literary and historic tourism with its roots in the Romantic period.²⁷ In Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ‘the personal effects and remains of nonreligious individuals began...to be treated as glowing with fetishistic value’,

²⁵ Lutz, p. 31.

²⁶ Alois Riegl, ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development’, trans. by Karin Bruckner with Karen Williams, in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirkby Talley Jr., and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), pp. 69-83 (first publ. as *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* [Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1903]), p. 69.

²⁷ See Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets’ Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lutz, p. 11; Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet*.

and dwelling places and sites of inspiration began to be similarly venerated: keen-feeling Wordsworth devotees were visiting the home of the poet as a site of pilgrimage even before his death in 1850.²⁸ These practices were popularised with the publication of books and guides to help the newly mobile Briton experience the birthplaces of history and its makers, most notably, in 1847, William Howitt's *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets*, which instructed the reader how to encounter figures including Milton, Dryden, Swift and Shelley, through visits to sites where their literary genius still clung, obscurely, to stone and earth.²⁹ Like public commemoration through statuary or ritual, such 'cultural tourism' can be understood as 'a performance of shared, personified memory,'³⁰ but more fundamentally it is also suggestive of a particular attitude towards the power of material traces of the body. Certain sites and personalities provoked especially feverish relic-hunting. Stuart Semmel writes that '[t]he months and years following Waterloo saw instant historical tourism of a rare type', with Britons seeking to 'apprehend recent history more *tangibly*' by visiting the battle site of Napoleon's defeat.³¹ Such readiness to seek out the material fragments of recent history suggests that we might read this behaviour as indicative of a particular kind of historical consciousness; Byron was a keen collector of Waterloo relics, as was Walter Scott. Semmel suggests that most tourist-collectors were motivated by a desire for a 'deep' understanding of events – not just how they had played out, but the forces and personalities involved: '[v]isiting sites and handling objects that had been inscribed by Napoleon now appeared to offer a means of communing with the fallen ruler, or of understanding the recent war and its terrible slaughter.'³² Lucasta Miller has described the 'literary cult' which developed around the Brontës in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in no small way assisted by Elizabeth

²⁸ Lutz, p. 11. For more on the changing status of Wordsworth's homes see Matthews, p. 156.

²⁹ William Howitt, *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1847).

³⁰ Alison Booth, 'Houses and Things: Literary House Museums as Collective Biography', in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 231-46 (p. 233).

³¹ Semmel, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*

Gaskell's fetishisation of Haworth and its landscapes in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published in 1857. Like Wordsworth's cottage at Grasmere, Haworth parsonage attracted literary devotees eager to revel in the atmosphere of the place even before Charlotte's death in 1855. Miller writes that visitors to Haworth, after the death of Patrick, the last surviving member of the family, in 1861, were so keen for Brontë relics that they scoured the parsonage for anything that might be removed, including the woodwork and lintels.³³ 'The veneration of Brontë relics', she adds, 'would become integral to the cult'.³⁴

The feverish excitement that some Victorians displayed for the objects and places associated with venerated historical and literary figures has often warranted comparisons with religious fervour.³⁵ The importance placed on birthplaces, sites of epiphany and creation, the material remains of the body, and objects intimately associated with the body, such as clothes or tools appears strikingly akin to particular Christian practices. The language of Victorian literary tourism borrows heavily from religious terminology; relics and shrines were frequently referred to and the Brontë devotees who descended on Haworth happily referred to themselves as pilgrims.³⁶ It has been suggested that this apparent closeness to Catholicism caused some Victorians to view relic-hunters with suspicion, but I have found little evidence of either a theological objection to the practice or an understanding of it as contiguous with religious ritual by any of its practitioners, beyond the terminology used.³⁷ I choose the term 'relic' because this is how Henry Cuming, and indeed most Victorians, commonly referred to objects associated with historical events or people, and given such terminology, it is tempting to view them as analogous

³³ Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p. 100.

³⁴ Miller, *The Brontë Myth*, p. 101.

³⁵ Stephen Arkin, 'Shrine Fever', *New England Review* (1978-1982), 3:4 (1981), 600-03; Simon Goldhill, *Freud's Couch, Scott's Buttocks, Brontë's Grave* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³⁶ Miller, *The Brontë Myth*, p. 99.

³⁷ See Goldhill, p. 6; Lutz, pp. 19-25. The contemporaneous exception to this is Roberts, 'Some Collecting Fads', in which it is claimed that '[t]he collecting mania is a direct result of the passion for religious relics so prevalent in mediæval times' (p. 235).

with religious relics, and to understand their function in a similar way.³⁸ Barnett, however, suggests that the perceived continuity between religious and secular material devotion 'obscures more than it illuminates.'³⁹ She argues that Victorian fervour for secular relics should be understood not simply as a continuation or branch of centuries-old interest in religious relics but as indicative of the 'unprecedented ways' in which 'investments in the dead body, which had long been assigned various theological meanings...were being renegotiated.'⁴⁰ For Barnett, secular relics have closer affiliations with the cult of sentimentality than with saints' reliquaries – operating through affect and empathy rather than divinity and transcendence – and their associations with sentimentality's keepsake and memento culture contributed to their expulsion from 'serious' historical analysis.

The importance of this is that relics are a crucial site where the interests of popular, private collecting diverge significantly from museum acquisition policy and practices. Whether Napoleonic or Brontë-related, collecting relics was a popular pastime for Victorians. There is a particular category of people, however, who not only collected, and therefore handled, relics, but also wrote about this experience. Antiquarians, occupying a liminal position in terms of burgeoning museum culture, were keen consumers of relics, amongst myriad other historical objects. An identifiable group since at least the mid eighteenth century, antiquarians in Victorian Britain were prolific producers of written reports and articles as their discipline became more formalised and created clubs and scholarly societies which, in turn, published journals and papers. Henry Cuming was an important, if historically overlooked, member of the British Archaeological Association (BAA). He became associated with the group not long after it was founded in 1843, and became its Secretary in 1856, serving in this position for several years and presenting 195 papers at their meetings until his death in 1902. Many of these were also published in the

³⁸ The significance of the etymology of 'relic' is discussed further in Barnett's *Sacred Relics*, pp. 51-53.

³⁹ Barnett, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Barnett, p. 31.

society's journal. He was very active in the community, attending meetings regularly to share his research and exhibit his finds, and his correspondence testifies that he was frequently called upon by his peers for assistance in identifying coins and seals. His interest in relics was strong and prolonged; he researched and published papers on the relics of James I, Richard III, Oliver Cromwell and Charles I (later enhanced by 'Supplementary Notes on the Relics of Charles I'), in addition to the various relics he owned but did not, as far as we know, write about, described above.⁴¹ In 1887, he opened his house to paying visitors to display 'about 100 mementoes of the reign of Queen Victoria', which included both specially-made trinkets commemorating the Jubilee, and articles worn and touched by Victoria herself.⁴² Henry's fascination with and fondness for relics, regardless of the prevailing scholarly attitude toward such items, is a continual theme throughout his antiquarian research and collecting practices; in an 1881 letter, he writes of the relics of Queen Caroline, wife of George IV, that 'the relics in my own cabinet are few in number and mere trifles in the eyes of most people, but they are dear to me'.⁴³

The Cuming collection comprises thousands of items, largely uncatalogued by the collectors themselves, and with contemporary efforts at a comprehensive catalogue still falling far short of completion. No extended study, or even survey, has been made of Henry's contributions to the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, in which he wrote about objects from his own collections but also items loaned to him or exhibited by other members of the BAA. This makes identifying physical objects in the collections into which Henry conducted research a difficult task, but in the case of the relics, luck, or

⁴¹ Henry Syer Cuming, 'On Relics and Mementos of James I', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 25 (1869), 321-34; 'Memorials of Richard III', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 19 (1863), 51-55; 'On Cromwellian Relics', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 13 (1857), 341-47; 'On the Relics of Charles I', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 11 (1855), 227-38; 'Supplementary Notes on the Relics of Charles I', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 12 (1856), 251-57;

⁴² [Anon], 'A Private Exhibition of Jubilee Mementoes', *The Walworth Herald and South London Chronicle*, 1 October 1887, p. 25.

⁴³ Letter from Henry Cuming to George Spencer Perceval, 27th December 1881. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum Archives, Perceval Bequest, GBR/0280/PERCEVAL/X.

perhaps Henry's assiduity on this particular topic, means that it is possible to match objects with text. Items relating to the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell, and King Charles I form the subject of several of Henry's articles, and he appears to have personally collected them, too.⁴⁴ He owned a fragment of Charles' waistcoat (figure 7) and a memento mori containing a woven piece of Charles' hair (figure 8).



Figure 7. Photograph of silk waistcoat fragment, set into frame. Cuming Museum object inventory number C04851.



Figure 8. Photograph of memento mori locket containing a model skeleton and woven hair. Cuming Museum object inventory number C04850.

Henry delivered his reports on these relics at meetings before they were published in the association's journal. His style, as is common in antiquarian research of the period, is detailed and meticulous. Large sections of these articles are devoted to describing the physical properties of the relics, which also include Charles's comb, sword-belt, gloves, and scent case. Henry also muses on the nature of his encounters with these objects, and

⁴⁴ Cromwell's body was a rich source of relics. William Bullock was offered Cromwell's head for sale in 1813 but declined to buy it in consideration of the women and children who might visit his exhibition (see Costeloe, pp. 53-54). On the earlier movements and meanings of Cromwell's objectified body, see Lorna Clymer, 'Cromwell's Head and Milton's Hair: Corpse Theory in Spectacular Bodies of the Interregnum', *The Eighteenth Century*, 40:2 (1999), 91-112.

writes suggestively about their imaginative power. Frequently, as the proceedings of the BAA meetings attest, Henry displays the relics as he discusses them – perhaps gesturing to them, holding them aloft, or passing them round. We cannot know precisely, but it is certain that the papers are delivered in the physical presence of many of the relics themselves. Objects associated with Charles's execution, such as the prayer book he used on the scaffold, or hankies dipped in his spilled blood, were particularly emotive. Henry describes them as 'affecting', and muses on the 'train of thought' that the relics 'evoke':

[t]hey lead us step by step through many a sad and trying scene...They awaken the recollection of many a restless spirit of that restless age. Prince and plebeian, friend and foe, the gay cavalier, the gloomy roundhead, seem to be resuscitated...one and all stand as it were before us as warning witnesses against the vices, sins and errors of that stormy age...⁴⁵

The relics evoke not only the individuals with whom they had contact, but a train of associations which provoke both the ghostly embodiment of historical figures and a moral reflection on historical events. In fact, although Henry asserts his objectivity as an 'archaeologist' in all of the articles about Charles and Cromwell, he seems unable to truly detach himself from the events that the relics record. 'To the archaeologist', he writes, 'who eschews all personal and party feeling, the relics of king and usurper, the fiercest tyrant and meekest slave, who hold a place in history, are of equal value.'⁴⁶ It is both his privilege and, he claims, a testament to his scholarly abilities, that he is able to stand 'neutral and unswayed amid contests and cabals, fearlessly delving into the secrets of courts and camps, dragging to light the plots of factions and the intrigues of party.'⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cuming, 'On the relics of Charles I', p. 237.

⁴⁶ Cuming, 'On Cromwellian Relics', p. 347.

⁴⁷ Cuming, 'On Cromwellian Relics', p. 341.

Henry's prose is steeped in emotive language, however, around the 'tragic story' which invests even the least politically-charged relic:

The only reputed relic of 'baby Charles' I have to produce is a left mitten of point-lace, - a rare and beautiful memorial of infancy...Whether this ever covered the tiny hand which at life's latest moment was thrust out as a signal to let fall the deadly axe, must ever remain uncertain...⁴⁸

The material presence of the relics leads Henry toward a kind of affective speculation. Resisting his attempts at objectivity, they offer him access to a cultural memory through the imaginative journey which they inspire.



Figure 9. Photograph of fragment of the windowsill of Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight. Cuming Museum object inventory number C10566.

Perhaps the most striking example of this is remarkable for the completely unexceptional nature of the object itself. The stone seen in figure 9 is a fragment of the windowsill at

⁴⁸ Cuming, 'Supplementary Notes on the Relics of Charles I', p. 251.

Carisbrooke castle on the Isle of Wight, where Charles was imprisoned after his defeat in the English Civil War. Henry's label reads 'Part of the Sill of the Window of Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight, from which Charles I attempted to escape, 1647. Obtained August 27th, 1866'. In its total lack of any other points of material interest, either aesthetically or in its composition, this dull lump of stone seems to exemplify the ability of touch to transform objects: it is only the King's frantic, scrambling encounter with this rock that makes it worth collecting. Henry's paper about the relics of Charles is themed to fit with a BAA outing, as part of its 12th annual meeting, to the Isle of Wight, and this trip included a visit to the site of Carisbrooke castle. As we have seen, the significance which permeates the unique materiality of historical sites can be considered a close relation to that of secular relics, and on the evening after the trip to Carisbrooke, Henry recites his paper to the gathered members. It begins as follows.

Look where we will there is something to remind us of the ill-fated monarch, something to recall his noble form and melancholy visage to the "mind's eye". There stands the moss-grown, ivy-mantled walls, within which he was incarcerated; the ramparts round which he often paced, brooding over his misfortunes, and laying plans for future action; the castle-yard, in which was situate [sic] the bowling-green where he beguiled the tedious hours of his imprisonment; the chamber where he slept; the iron-grated window through which he made futile efforts to escape, and beneath which lurked the wily Edmond Rolph, with murderous intent upon the life of his royal master. These and other reminiscences crowd upon us, as we gaze upon the once stronghold.⁴⁹

Just like the relics, the unique materiality of Carisbrooke castle inspires Henry to imaginatively contemplate historical events. The objects provide a way to imagine a

⁴⁹ Cuming, 'On the relics of Charles I', p. 227.

connection with a person or people, and a way to experience a feeling of connectedness to cultural memory, a sense of community with an imagined past or an otherwise inaccessible history.

Henry's reaction to the relics is typical of nineteenth-century encounters with such objects. Even those as unremarkable as the fragment of windowsill seem capable of provoking imaginative contemplation of history. It also goes some way toward demonstrating why relics were unsuited to Victorian historiography, such as it was, and museum display. Secular relics did not function appropriately within the terms of the Victorian museum; rather than providing the materials for the creation of an objective knowledge set about the world, they darkly promised the possibility of another kind of knowledge, one that could not be learned or spoken, but must be *felt*. Barnett describes the secular relic's power in terms of its ability to

...sketch an alternative genealogy of the historical – one that occurs in relation to the material world, that admits impulses other than the need to generate conceptual structures, and that may involve emotional connections, the relationship between the living and the dead, and the processing of mortality and loss.⁵⁰

She understands relics as 'the necessary means of negotiating affective transactions with the past – as objects that worked to do things that could be done in no other way.'⁵¹ Indeed, the BAA's trip to Carisbrooke is itself suggestive of the unique abilities of the secular relic, or its less portable analogue, the historical site, to provide a means of accessing these 'affective transactions'. The historical specificity and material irreplaceability of the relic requires a physical encounter in order to be ignited. Peter Mandler has written of the rich historical imagination of Victorian tourists, who sought out

⁵⁰ Barnett, pp. 3-4.

⁵¹ Barnett, p. 5.

‘unique physical encounter[s]’ with historical sites and buildings in order to engage in imaginative reverie.⁵² Although, Mandler notes, historical events could be, and were, consumed as texts and images, these representations were viewed as preparatory ahead of the encounter with the site itself. There was something gained from proximity that could not be attained otherwise.

Archaeologist Sian Jones has explored touch’s important role in people’s experiences of heritage sites. She notes that touching objects plays a crucial part in people’s perceptions of an object’s ‘authenticity’, where that term refers, not to ideas around material integrity, but, rather, a more slippery concept of ‘aura’ or ‘voicefulness’, which connects people with an object’s ‘network of relationships with past and present people and places’.⁵³ Touching, she notes, facilitates encounters in which we are more attuned to objects’ biographies and historical networks:

...direct experience of an historic object can achieve a form of magical communion through personal incorporation into that network. Thus the process of negotiating the authenticity of material things can also be a means of establishing the authenticity of the self. However, the effectiveness of this process depends upon people’s ability to establish relationships with objects, and the networks of people and places they have been associated with during their unique cultural biographies. The materiality of objects is crucial here, as is some form of physical contact or intimate experience of them. This is...because the materiality of objects embodies the past experiences and relationships that they have been part of, and

⁵² Peter Mandler, ‘The Wand of Fancy’: The Historical Imagination of the Victorian Tourist’, in *Material Memories*, ed. by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 125-42 (p. 139).

⁵³ Sian Jones, ‘Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 15 (2010), 181-203 (p. 189).

facilitates some kind of ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships.⁵⁴

Jones recognises that touch enables an intimacy with objects that allows us to position ourselves as players in the networks of people and places in which the object is implicated. Touching things – placing our hands and bodies where other hands and bodies have been – allows an intimate, empathetic, imaginative connection to take place with the past and the people that inhabit it. Running the ridges of a coin through our fingers and turning it about in our palm can be a similar experience to walking through an historic building like a cathedral. We feel connected with others whose bodies have played out the same actions. Jones's work is based on research conducted into perceptions of heritage in twentieth-century rural Scotland, and it is vitally important to note, indeed it is a cornerstone of the argument of this thesis, that touch is always culturally mediated. Therefore one should be cautious before attributing nineteenth-century encounters with historically significant objects and places with the same quality of communion. But other kinds of evidence lead us to suggest that touching had, at least for some Victorians, the same kinds of values and properties.

The writings of some of Henry Cuming's antiquarian peers suggest that it was difficult to navigate the multiple valencies of historical objects, particularly during tactile encounters. Many antiquarian writings attest to the fact that their authors continued to negotiate the imaginative emotional connection with the past which the close engagement with the objects of their study inevitably provoked, with their attempts to create a 'scientific' and objective discipline.⁵⁵ This was especially true of relics, but many items which materialised touch seem to have wielded a similar power. In 1858, antiquary John Marsden addressed

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Hill, pp. 161-62.

the inaugural meeting of the Essex Archaeological Society with a speech that invoked the imaginative appeal of objects and the creative role of the antiquarian:

There is a close connection between the antiquary and the poet; between him who presents to us the airy and insubstantial creations of his own mind, and him whose occupation is among objects, which he can touch and handle, and pry into, and weigh and measure.⁵⁶

Comparing the antiquarian to the poet, Marsden clearly sees the study of antiquity as at least in part an imaginative endeavour, which attempts to find some anchor in the objective through the ability to ‘weigh and measure’ the objects of his wonderings. The object’s material presence, as well as the antiquarian’s ability to ‘touch and handle’ it, are an essential part of the antiquarian’s endeavours – it is this which allows one access to the imaginative generation of historical people and scenes. Even ‘the most torpid imagination is at once set to work’, he goes on, ‘by the contemplation of an object, however trifling, which is believed to have been part and parcel of the scenes of past ages – all this magic virtue is deposited’.⁵⁷ In designating the object the site of the ‘deposit’ of history, Marsden asserts the absolute centrality of the material thing to the provocation of the historical imagination, but also consequently the necessity of the consciousness required to unlock the ‘magic’ of the object. Thus, he demonstrates that the thing’s meaning is resident in neither the object nor the subject, but requires the interaction of the two to be brought into being. Marsden’s poetic eulogising of the charms of antiquarian and archaeological research is tempered by pleas for the application of judgement and reason along with imagination, but his reference to the ‘magic’ inherent in antiquities suggests an ineffable quality at the centre of such items that research cannot access.

⁵⁶ John Marsden, ‘Inaugural Lecture on Archaeology’, *The Essex Archaeological Society*, i (1858), 6-25 (p. 22).

⁵⁷ Marsden, p. 19.

This magic is encountered only in the sensuous perception of the object, as Marsden repeatedly invokes scenarios in which the discoverer of an ancient coin, pot, or monument, is instantly transported on an imaginative journey through time in the moment of the physical encounter with the object. Tactile contact with the hands of historic actors, across time and space, and through the material objects of his study, is clearly an evocative and important repeated experience for Marsden, who writes that one 'cannot pick up the coin which was once passing from hand to hand among the Roman colonists and their subjugated neighbours...without craving a further acquaintance with the manners, and the history, and the literature of that mighty nation, by whom these things were constructed and used.'⁵⁸ In fact, Marsden views the affective and sympathetic relationships with the past which might be established by antiquarian activity as the ultimate goal of his research: 'what knowledge is more elevating to the mind – than that which induces a congeniality of thought with the wise and noble spirits of former days?'⁵⁹ 'By far the greatest portion' he goes on, 'of the pleasure which Archaeology provides for us in the contemplation of the relics of the past, arises from Association. The object, before us, formed a part and parcel, in scenes of bygone days, and Imagination presents the actors, in those scenes, to the mind's eye.'⁶⁰ The material presence of antiquity, for Marsden, not only invites such dream-like contemplation and connection, but renders it inevitable. Marsden's speech is a particularly lucid and erudite contemplation of the joys and pitfalls of antiquarianism, but he is not an anomaly; his sentiments are echoed throughout the writings of archaeological and antiquarian society members all over Britain.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Marsden, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Marsden, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Marsden, p. 14.

⁶¹ See Virginia Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain: Victorian Responses to a Roman Past* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007). Marsden is an interesting figure because in 1852 he was already the first appointee to the Disney Professorship of Archaeology, although he was a cleric by training. He was very active in the Essex Archaeological Society; in fact the speech he gave at his inaugural lecture at Cambridge was largely the same as the one quoted above. Philippa Levine has called it a marker of archaeology's absorption into the academy that Marsden would not have been appointed to the Disney Professorship, or any other academic position, by the end of the century (see *The Amateur*

Relics, and to some extent, all kinds of historic objects, as Marsden's speech testifies, offered a sense of connection with histories and places that Victorians might otherwise feel remote or estranged from in a period of rapid industrial and technological advance. To touch them was to link the body with public life, and to understand oneself as a constituent of, and player in, that public narrative called history. Museums were a significant means by which the public was confronted with this public narrative, but as the previous chapter explored, they presented history as a series of scenes and objects to be contemplated. Distance between the displays and visitors was maintained through a variety of material strategies so that this objective, empirical stance could be maintained, and as such, state museums reinforced a positivist view of history. Positivist historiography is predicated upon the establishment of 'a dispassionate, disinterested distance from past events as a means of establishing objectivity', even when such 'critical distance between the historian and the event stifles the event's emotional impact.'⁶² Because relics facilitated the imaginative projection of one's own self into the settings and stories associated with the object they were inimical to the objective analysis of historical 'truth' which was the professed project of the nineteenth-century museum. But relics continued to be a popular cultural form because they shared with other space-binding, time-binding media the ability to link distant points in time and space.

The comparison with communicative technologies is important because the experience of touching relics is a mutual, reciprocal process. To touch a relic is not just to come into contact with history, but to feel its impact upon oneself, and in turn, to feel that one might participate in history and its making; it allows 'the experience of the world as contingent

and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 36).

⁶² David A. Davis, 'The Forgotten Apocalypse: Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Riders," Traumatic Memory, and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 43:2 (2011), 55-74 (p. 62).

and interconnected, questioning the sharp divide between object and subject'.⁶³ Susan Stewart has noted the importance of touch's reciprocal nature:

To be in contact with an object means to be moved by it – to have the pressure of its existence brought into a relation with the pressure of our own bodily existence. And this pressure perceived by touch involves an actual change; we are changed and so is the object.⁶⁴

For Stewart, touch is not merely the benign contact of two beings; to touch and be touched is a two-way relationship. This reciprocity is the index of touch's ability to connect us affectively and imaginatively with that which we touch: to engage haptically with an object, and by extension the life of that object, is to engage with it emotionally, too. Touch's particular capacity to engender an affective sensation of connection is a function of the relic's tangibility and of our shared materiality: we inhabit our world bodily, and it touches us back. In Merleau-Ponty's formulation, the body is both 'a thing among things' and also 'what sees them and touches them', so that 'its double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and the order of the 'subject' reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders'.⁶⁵ At its most fundamental, then, our perception and acceptance of our shared existence with objects in a world of matter can provide the basis of unexpected, moving, affective relationships with things, something which the encounters of some Victorian antiquarian collectors acknowledged, but which the museum sought to constrain.

Similarly, reciprocity is an important component of Benjamin's description of the experience of aura, a sense of the 'associations' which 'tend to cluster around the object of

⁶³ Geisbuch, p. 207.

⁶⁴ Susan Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch', in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Berg: Oxford, 1999), pp. 17-36 (p. 32).

⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. by Claude Lefort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 137.

a perception.⁶⁶ 'To perceive the aura of an object we look at', he writes, 'means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.'⁶⁷ Although Benjamin uses the language of vision in this instance, he does suggest that the body might be involved in the constitution and transmission of aura, as 'its analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practised hand.'⁶⁸ Benjamin's aura is a kind of veiled presence carried by objects which incorporates traces of its history and authenticity. The loss of aura in society is associated with the rise of mass-produced and machine-wrought goods, objects that are entirely fungible, rather than carrying with them the individual and irreplaceable meanings and associations derived from a history of wear and use.⁶⁹ Experiencing aura, writes Benjamin, is akin to a kind of anthropomorphism, as doing so 'rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man.'⁷⁰ To experience aura is to feel about objects the way that we feel about humans, to extend our empathic capacities to the object world. If we feel an object return our attentions, then it can be said to possess aura. As such, the experience of aura is contingent on the perceived object and the perceiving subject; it cannot exist independently of either, but exists in the encounter between the two.⁷¹ Clearly, the relics which are the focus of this chapter have the potential to be highly auratic objects, activated by human contact, with distinct 'associations' that cling to them.

To enable that numinous connection to be forged, however, the life of the object must be accessible. As has been noted, secular relics are often mundane objects – incidental, quotidian things that happen to have been graced by the touch of history. They do not

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 182.

⁶⁷ Benjamin, p. 184.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, p. 182.

⁶⁹ See Benjamin, p. 215.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, p. 184.

⁷¹ See Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 336-75, for a fuller exploration of Benjamin's various uses of 'aura'.

declare their distinction materially. It must be kept alive by other means. Henry Cuming, as was common of relic-collectors, recorded fastidiously the narratives which accompanied his objects. In his article 'On the Relics of Charles I', Henry recounts the stories of each object he exhibits, beginning with the moment the relic left the body of Charles and continuing, as exhaustively as possible, right up to the present day. The story's beginning point is important – before departure from the King's body, the object is not a relic. It is the ghost of the touch that is the necessary condition for the relic to come into being; thus it signals the 'simultaneous 'presence and absence' of the body'.⁷² The fragment of Charles's waistcoat in figure 7 is mounted along with a note explaining its provenance, written in Henry's hand: 'Formerly in the possession of Miss Eliza Latham, a cousin of the Earl of Derby, & presented by her to Mrs [indecipherable], from whom I received it, Dec 26 1871'.⁷³ The locket, we learn from one of his articles, 'has been in my family's possession from time immemorial, and was, in all probability, a gift from prince Rupert.'⁷⁴ Although their meaning may be encoded physically – touched, worn by, or part of – relics are nothing without their associations. The collected relic, therefore, speaks to a guiding principle directly in contrast to the aims of nineteenth century museums' display principles: it resolutely fails to speak for itself. Relics depend on the viewer to attribute meaning. A lump of rock, a shoe, a scrap of cloth – this is what relics are reduced to when detached from their narratives. What material culture means, it has been asserted, 'depends wholly on the experience and memory bank of the receiver', and indeed, the polysemy of objects means that, left to speak for themselves, we find them often resolutely silent.⁷⁵ Meaning is created somewhere between the perceived object and the perceiving

⁷² Hill, p. 153.

⁷³ Entry into the collection is, for Henry, the end of the object's life span, but collections do not have to signal the end of object biographies. Things move in and out of collections, and even if they remain, may be decontextualised - as the collection moves through different hands or spaces, or grows or shrinks. All of these actions on the group of objects affect the biography of the single object.

⁷⁴ Cuming, 'Supplementary Notes on the Relics of Charles I', p. 254.

⁷⁵ Brooke Hindle, 'How Much Is a Piece of the True Cross Worth?', in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. by Ian M. G. Quimby (Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1978), pp. 5-20 (p. 9). See also Susan M. Pearce, 'Objects as Meaning: Or Narrating the Past' in *Interpreting Objects and*

subject. Of course this can be said to be true of all museum objects, to some degree, but the reliance on the perceiver is particularly explicit with the relic. Rachel Maines and Peter Glynn, who term relics 'numinous' objects because of the 'special sociocultural magic' with which they are imbued, have written at length on how contemporary museum professionals should deal with the instability of meaning provoked by secular relics.⁷⁶ They write that

[t]he *numen* cannot be exorcised from an artifact as long as there is a single person who remembers the association of the object with the significant person, place, or event. Conversely, the *numen* is extinguished by the deaths of all those who remembered the association, and by the loss of the documentation that carries their experiences into the next generation.⁷⁷

Numinous objects, therefore, continually threaten to slip back into insignificance. Indeed, Henry Cuming discredits the authenticity of a bedstead and a pillow case in his article on 'Memorials of Richard III', showing them to be examples of craftsmanship long post-dating the monarch's stay in the inn from which they came.⁷⁸ These and other 'spurious mementoes' which Henry details, including a horse-trough said to be made of the coffin of the king, remain relics, however – belief in the story being more important than its truth. As Maines and Glynn suggest, 'the documentation, preservation, and interpretation of numinous objects from our own culture pose challenges to the traditional model of historical objectivity...the viscerally persuasive character of historical *numina* can, in fact, overwhelm all efforts to interpret what historians believe to be the truth about the past.'⁷⁹

Collections, ed. by Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 19-29 and Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 91.

⁷⁶ Rachel P. Maines and James J. Glynn, 'Numinous Objects', *The Public Historian* 15:1 (1993), 8-25 (p. 10).

⁷⁷ Maines and Glynn, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Cuming, 'Memorials of Richard III', pp. 53-54.

⁷⁹ Maines and Glynn, pp. 16-17.

Relics are difficult to corral into museal narratives. They are slippery, suggestive. There was no place for this errant myth making in the Victorian museum, but the collection could accommodate emotion, imagination and memory.

The relic's unstable meaning proved easy to exploit in the nineteenth century. Antiquarian interest in the dusty and long-forgotten fragments of history was the subject of mockery and derision in the popular press, and their passion for relics, the incidentals of history, was particularly scorned.⁸⁰ The keenness of antiquarian collectors to possess 'pieces of the past' could often be taken advantage of, and trade of fake and forged antiquities flourished in London at the time; Henry Cuming wrote several articles intended to help his community to avoid repeat offenders, and was many time a victim of forgers himself. An anonymous contributor to *The Graphic* calls antiquaries 'the most gullible of the class termed collectors', themselves 'a credulous race', liable to be fooled by the simplest of scams.⁸¹ Relics, by their very nature, were particularly subject to forgery, as all that was needed to instil value in the object was the belief that it had played some part in historical events or the life of a venerated individual: '[s]o much is left to the imagination', continued *The Graphic*, 'that those who prey upon them have a wide margin in which to move.'⁸² A convincing story made a convincing relic. George Augustus Sala, writing in *Household Words* of Cawdor Street, an area of central London notorious for its junk and antique shops, wonders how, 'to the man of poetical imagination, what can be more pleasant than to wander through these dingy bazaars of the furniture, and armour, and knick-knackery of other days?'⁸³ Every object, every piece of bric-a-brac, is suffused with the possibility of relic-hood:

⁸⁰ See, for example, [Anon.], 'Antiquarian Society', *Punch*, 27 May 1843, p. 214, in which the members of a learned society speculate excitedly about the potentially ancient origins and obscure meanings of some marbles found in a garret, only to be told that they are some toys of the present century illustrating the story of the 'House that Jack Built'.

⁸¹ [Anon.], 'Dealers in Shams', *The Graphic*, 5 October 1872, p. 315.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ [George Augustus Sala], 'Travels in Cawdor Street', *Household Words*, 4:100 (21 February 1852), pp. 517-21 (p. 519).

Cromwell's name is but a noise; but those ragged buff-boots may have enclosed his Protectorial extremities. The mattock, and the spade, and the earthworm have done their work with Diana de Poitiers and Gabrielle d'Estrées ; yet in that quaint Venetian mirror they may have dressed their shining locks, and mirrored back their sunny glances. That should have been the Black Prince's surcoat; that pearl and ivory box, the jewel-casket of Ninon de l'Enclos⁸⁴

In this gruesome comparison between the buried, worm-infested remains of human bodies and the mirror which might still reflect their attractive living forms, Sala calls attention to the promise of relics: that, through their generative imaginary potency, we might converse with the dead once more. The lure of the relic is precisely its ability to act as a space-binding, time-binding medium. The possibility of connection to a historical individual lies latent in its tangible material form; the mirror's reflection offers a way to join the contemporary viewer with the historical one. Sala goes on to examine the roaring trade in art forgery occurring in central London, but this passage expressly plays on the potential of any item to become a secular relic; all that is required is a physical connection to greatness, or, failing that, a convincing story of such.

London, of course, provided a rich seam of antiquities, and a corresponding market for fakes, as extensive dredging work on the Thames and the digging of new roads and building foundations continually churned up the ground and the objects buried in it. Clearly, most of what was recovered from the mud by excavators could not stake a claim to relic-hood, but it nevertheless provided rich imaginative material for antiquarians, who were keen to collect it. Henry Cuming wrote several articles on skulls and coins recovered from the Thames, and doggedly established the location that many finds were recovered

⁸⁴ Ibid.

from, and which dredgers and workmen had attempted to keep secret for their own gain.⁸⁵ There were finds, and corresponding forgeries, of weaponry, ceramics, tools and religious objects, dating from the Iron Age onwards. In particular, as both Virginia Hoselitz and Virginia Zimmerman have noted in their studies of Victorian antiquarian research, the remnants of the Roman Empire proved especially fascinating to Londoners, perhaps because they provided potent materials with which Victorian Britons could forge imaginative connections to their historical counterparts. Excavations at Pompeii had been a frequent topic in the British press throughout the century, with tales of the remarkable preservation of an unremarkable town frequently making headlines. Simultaneously, London, and especially the Thames, were yielding archaeological finds at such a rate that the MP John Burns is reputed to have called the river 'liquid history'.⁸⁶ Both sites were striking because of their ability to bring the past to life through an emphasis on the material detritus of the everyday. They frequently provided Henry Cuming with materials for his antiquarian research and writings; in an 1855 article 'On Spectacles', he compares specimens of lenses found in Pompeii and London that year.⁸⁷ Zimmerman writes that both sites were known 'for their ticket stubs, hair combs, and sandals, all traces of individual experiences, objects of little value or importance in their own time and notable in the nineteenth century only because of their striking familiarity'.⁸⁸ Victorian Britons could recognise themselves in the fragments of material culture left behind by the Roman Empire. Because of the nature of what was abandoned at Pompeii – things too incidental to be worth saving – a picture of life emerged through archaeological research which was grounded in the trivial and quotidian. In her study of antiquarian writings, Hoselitz notes that

⁸⁵ Jonathan Cotton, 'Ballast-Heavers and Battle-Axes: The 'Golden Age' of Thames Finds', in *Mark Dion: Archaeology*, Mark Dion and Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishers, 1999), pp. 58-71.

⁸⁶ Nathalie Cohen, 'Liquid History: Excavating London's Great River, The Thames', *Current Archaeology*, 25 July 2010, <<http://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/liquid-history-excavating-londons-great-river-the-thames.htm>> [accessed 20 July 2012].

⁸⁷ Henry Syer Cuming, 'On Spectacles', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 11 (1855), 144-50.

⁸⁸ Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 98.

[s]ome objects seemed to connect at a human level in such a way as to make sense of the past in *quite a different way* from that of contemporary traditional history. Such objects evoked human sympathy as they tended to be those that held some imprint of a human presence and activity.⁸⁹

The 'imprint of human presence' was to be found in everyday objects – things frequently held and used, like cutlery, or tools for grooming or craft, and things that had been worn close to the body: a bracelet, for example, 'poignantly suggests the mortality of the woman who once wore the jewel; it notably encircles emptiness where it once encircled flesh.'⁹⁰ In a culture of material memorial that valued so highly the continued presence of the dead through mourning jewellery and hair work, such objects, unearthed after centuries in the soil, had a powerful potency. They encouraged the formation of a sympathetic and sentimental connection between the perceiver and the past users of the object, allowing Victorians to better conceive of a continuity between themselves and historically and geographically distant people. A conception of history which 'emphasized the interrelation between past and present', was as Zimmerman claims, 'dependent on...quotidian traces'.⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty speaks of the tactile power of such items when he notes that 'in the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. *Someone* uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning'.⁹² Material traces of the body can powerfully engender imaginative sympathy.

Objects which bear the marks of human presence can be particularly provoking, as patina enables human touch to be registered visually. Stephen Arkin, in his essay on literary

⁸⁹ Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain*, pp. 164-65, emphasis mine.

⁹⁰ Zimmerman, p. 20.

⁹¹ Zimmerman, p. 98.

⁹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), p. 348.

pilgrimages, writes of the 'confusion' of feelings that the marks of the hand can evoke, speaking of 'the peculiarly powerful sense one gets staring at something handworn, however isolated by a glass case.'⁹³ Ken Arnold has suggested that the ability of the viewer to derive 'emotional potency and narrative meaning' from objects is much enhanced if they carry a 'patina of use, care or love', and Stephen Greenblatt writes that marked objects are compelling 'as signs of use, marks of the human touch, and hence links with the openness to touch that was the condition of their creation'.⁹⁴ This 'openness', the polysemy of material culture 'that museums obviously dread',⁹⁵ is made visually accessible through patina, which must stand in for touch in glass cases. Moreover, patina acts as evidence of habitual use, a kind of knowledge of the object which remains unspoken. It is the material register of an embodied, unthinking knowledge that finds its home in the everyday.⁹⁶ Patina is identified by Benjamin as a constituent component of an object's aura, and Kate Hill has suggested that 'bodily objects accrued their most affective power through...senses, particularly touch, and through the multiplicity of sensory information they contain'.⁹⁷ The mobilising of this affective power, as we have seen, depended on a belief in the object's authenticity, and patina could play an important role in verifying this. Henry Cuming wrote to his friend George Spencer Perceval in 1891 that '[i]t is a pity the seal you speak of has been too well cleaned. I have seen several objects which one day were beyond all question genuine which were the next looked upon with suspicion on account of their bright aspect. Every old thing should be touched with care and respect.'⁹⁸ By this time, patina's value as a material register of the accretions of human experience contained in

⁹³ Arkin, p. 602.

⁹⁴ Arnold, pp. 91, 92; Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 42-56 (p. 44).

⁹⁵ Greenblatt, p. 43.

⁹⁶ See Michael Taussig, 'Tactility and Distraction', *Cultural Anthropology*, 6:2 (1991), 147-53.

⁹⁷ Hill, 'Collecting and the Body', p. 166. See Benjamin, p. 214; 'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership.'

⁹⁸ Letter from Henry Cuming to George Spencer Perceval, 6th July 1891. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum Archives, Perceval Bequest, GBR/0280/PERCEVAL/X, (178-1984).

the object was becoming more valuable, both to antiquarians like Henry, interested in the history of everyday life, and more broadly, as the encroachment of modernity invested new power in the idea of authenticity. Over time, objects slowly yield to touch, and patina verified not only the age of an object but also the fact of its repeated use and its sustained intimacy with historical bodies. It might, therefore, facilitate the conjuring of the 'close presences' of those historical others which inhabit the cultural object. Of course, like the relic's stories, patina could be falsified – Deborah Cohen writes that dealers in fake antiques at the turn of the century had rabbits scamper over their furniture to give it an aged aspect.⁹⁹ These attempts to fake the leavings of the body testify to the popularity and desirability of time- and hand-marked objects in the period. Hill suggests that patina acted to affirm the 'unique materiality' of objects, as, in turn, ordinary objects became more potent through their ability to demonstrate a set of conditions that were becoming increasingly valued:

...it was objects whose surfaces signified hand production, and age and wear, preferably the age and wear an object gets by intimate domestic use and by being handed down from generation to generation - a specific patina.¹⁰⁰

Hill's research into the accession records for regional municipal museums at the turn of the century indicates that intimate domestic objects were deemed more worthy of museum donation by ordinary working people by the turn of the century, suggesting that 'a new way of valuing and relating to the past' was common by this time, one with an 'emphasis on the domestic, familial, and local, and on souvenirs that tie their owner and their family into wider historical events'.¹⁰¹ The kinds of objects which Hill finds in the

⁹⁹ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 157.

¹⁰⁰ Kate Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity: Domestic, Familial, and Everyday "Old Things" in English Museums, 1850-1939', *Museum History Journal*, 4:2 (2011), 203-22 (p. 219).

¹⁰¹ Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity', p. 209. See also Hill, 'Collecting and the Body'.

accession records of local museums are not relics, as such, nor keepsakes. Their value is accrued, not through association with a memorable event or person, on a public or personal level, but through repeated use, and daily involvement in everyday lives. It is a sign of changing historical outlook that those lives were beginning to be thought worthy of commemoration in public museums by the end of the century, and that these intimate objects were the materials with which that commemoration was enacted.¹⁰²

If the focus of this discussion has perceptibly shifted from the relics of kings and queens and great historical feats to the material things which mark far less celebrated events, this slippage is indicative of the dangers of relics themselves. Relics upset museal narratives because their only relevance to history is the quality of having 'been there'. As material witnesses to the past, they offered little to nineteenth-century museums that might be transmitted in visual displays; rather, they disrupted the distance necessary for the operation of the critical, observational eye, and invited the touch of the hand. But their perceived incidental nature threatened the museum in other ways, too. If the only requirement for objects to be museum-worthy was their proximity to historical events or persons, then, once the very idea of historical significance began to be eroded by gradualism, every moment might require marking, every object, saving. The influence of the Darwinian revolution of the 1860s is of crucial importance to this change, as history in the popular imagination ceased to exist as a set of epochal events separated by many years, and became rather a series of individually insignificant events that gained their power incrementally, through accumulation.¹⁰³ Thus, the small was given a new, cumulative power by the gradualism of Darwin and his predecessor Lyell.¹⁰⁴ As Pierre

¹⁰² On increased interest in the 'personal past' at the end of the nineteenth century, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁰³ See Albert Eide Parr, 'History and the Historical Museum', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 15:1 (1972), 53-61 for one perspective on how gradualism affected history museums and the presentation of relics therein.

¹⁰⁴ Bennett describes how other fields such as archaeology, art history, psychoanalysis and medicine also contributed to this elevation of the trivial through their focus on what can be discerned through detail (p. 39).

Nora suggests in his influential essay on the material resting places of memory, 'Les Lieux de Mémoire',

the loss of a single explanatory principle, while casting us into a fragmented universe, has promoted every object - even the most humble, the most improbable, the most inaccessible - to the dignity of a historical mystery. Since no one knows what the past will be made of next, anxiety turns everything into a trace, a possible indication, a hint of history that contaminates the innocence of all things.¹⁰⁵

Thus constructions of historical narrative attended to the ever-smaller, the formerly insignificant and the apparently irrelevant. As the essayist Walter Bagehot commented in 1873, observing the wider effects of Darwinian principles, 'perhaps the most marked result' of recent thought is that 'by it everything is made 'an antiquity'.' Antiquarians in former times, he says, concerned themselves with medals and coins, '[b]ut now there are other relics; indeed, all matter is become such.'¹⁰⁶ In a new intellectual climate in which even the smallest things might contribute to the movement of history, everything is conferred the status of relic.

This is aptly demonstrated by the Cumings' collection of relics. Tellingly, Henry Cuming titles the portion of his manuscript catalogue which lists the relics in his collection 'memorials of events', suggesting the capacity of objects to act as tangible markers for events which otherwise leave no material trace. Alongside the 'cut glass chandelier drop' struck from Napoleon's coffin, and the tooth of Don Alphonso VI, King of Portugal, two unremarkable objects with rather pedestrian associations are listed in the catalogue. One

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24 (p. 17).

¹⁰⁶ Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics: Or Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society* (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1873), pp. 2-3, quoted in Bennett, p. 4.

is a fragment of glass struck from the Cumings' own window by a hail stone during a storm in 1846 and the other is a marble which represents the size of the hailstone.

Contemporaneous newspapers confirm that this storm was a fairly surprising meteorological event which did warrant some reportage due to its severity.¹⁰⁷ But the storm's historical significance must be understood differently to the death of Napoleon, or the Portugese monarchy, to which the other relics pertain. This is quotidian history, and the objects by which it is commemorated are more quotidian still, the fragment of glass an especially tangential object. Henry's relic collecting serves not only to forge a material link between the collector and the celebrated histories his relics pertain to, connecting him to the vast web of history. It also resolutely celebrates a history grounded in the everyday, and constructed by the amateur. Also finding a home in the collection is the number from the front door of the Cuming family home in Dean's Row; a human skull is marked in Henry's writing, with a note explaining that it was the last specimen his father handled, less than 60 hours before his death in 1870.¹⁰⁸ It is inconceivable that such objects and stories would have found a home in the nineteenth-century museum, but collectors were free to indulge in what might have been read, in the nineteenth century, as whimsy, but which we might now understand as an alternative means of history-making, one founded upon personal traces.

As these examples demonstrate, everything has the capacity to be a relic of something, a marker of an event felt worthy of commemoration or preservation by someone. In an era when the museum was already at threat of being subsumed by the abundance of objects it contained, to the obfuscation of its educational aims, the question of value was uppermost.¹⁰⁹ What could be most usefully displayed? To what end? What story was the museum seeking to tell? Relics fell foul of these questions. Their troubling affinity with

¹⁰⁷ [Anon.], 'The Great Storm of Saturday Last', *Illustrated London News*, 8 August 1846, p. 85.

¹⁰⁸ See objects C09743 and C04819 on Southwark Collections online.

¹⁰⁹ Victorian perceptions of the excess in museum collections are examined in part two of this thesis.

historical bodies suggested that as objects of study, such things were too powerful, too moving, to be afforded the critical distance necessary for empirical research. They were potent carriers of bodily traces, memories and testimonies that could be stirred by a simple brush of the hand. As Nora writes, '[h]istory is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it'.¹¹⁰ In the pursuit of an objective, teleological history, that which promises the experience of subjective memory must be quashed. But collectors were free to construct relics wherever they saw fit.

The acquisitive madness legitimated by the idea that every material object, every fragment, or every moment, might be worth preserving, is demonstrated by an account of a collector of corks which appears in an issue of *Chambers's Journal* from 1871. The article, aptly entitled 'Odd Collections', relates the tale of 'a poverty-stricken old man' who 'drew his last breath in a miserable attic in Paris', leaving nothing but 'a heap of corks' behind him.¹¹¹ The corks had been preserved by the collector because they had borne witness to many significant, and many less-significant, episodes in his life;

It had been a life-long custom with him to preserve every cork drawn for the delectation of himself and his friends, and inscribe upon it the date of drawing and the particular occasion upon which the bottle was opened; so that his cupboard of corks was actually a record of his life...This strange and sad autobiographical collection was methodically arranged in chronological order, ready for the place its unhappy owner hoped it would find in some public museum or philosopher's study.¹¹²

The sadness of the collector's death is given a further poignancy by the contrast between his wishes for his carefully preserved and labelled collection, and the reception it will

¹¹⁰ Nora, p. 9.

¹¹¹ [Anon.], 'Odd Collections', *Chambers's Journal*, 30 September 1871, pp. 612-14 (p. 614).

¹¹² Ibid.

inevitably receive after his death.¹¹³ It will never enter a museum. Relic-collecting to such an extreme marks the man out as freakish, pathological even, in his habits. He descends into the morally dubious position of the miser or hoarder, his internalised systems of value entirely out of line with the prevailing culture's.¹¹⁴ His over-zealous identification of relics highlights some of the very real fears of nineteenth-century museal culture; if every moment deserves memorialising, where does the collection stop?

The cork enthusiast demonstrates one of the remarkable capacities of the collector; the ability to make relics. This, observes Russell Belk, is the process which Benjamin gives voice to in his essay on collecting, 'Unpacking My Library'; '[i]f such mass-produced objects as books, even rare editions, lack an aura by themselves, their ardent pursuit, passionate acquisition, and worshipful possession in a collection can provide one.'¹¹⁵ Benjamin describes how the labour of unpacking his collection stirs the memories attached to each object, '[m]emories of the cities in which I found so many things...memories of the rooms where these books had been housed.'¹¹⁶ Like the cork collector, Benjamin sacralises his objects through their inclusion in his collection, inscribing them with the individual narratives and histories which give them the force of the unrepeatable and which turn their materiality into relichood. This function of collecting was acknowledged in the nineteenth century: Montresor's collecting guide for children, *On Hobby Horses*, ends with a startlingly moving passage in which she entreats her young collectors that their hobby might provide 'a link with the past', '[f]or, after all, the greatest delight which a collection of any kind can afford is the memory of the days in

¹¹³ For a modern parallel to the cork collector, see the case of Christian C. Sanderson, discussed by Maines and Glynn in 'Numinous Objects' and by Teresa Barnett in 'Tradition and the Individual Memory: The Case of Christian C. Sanderson', in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. by Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 221-35.

¹¹⁴ I will explore the miser's and hoarder's ability to disturb ideas of value in part two of this thesis.

¹¹⁵ Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 61.

¹¹⁶ Benjamin, p. 68.

which it was formed'.¹¹⁷ Each collected object, for its collector, becomes a relic and a record: irreplaceable; authentic; auratic. 'Every acquisition', writes Roger Cardinal, 'marks an unrepeatable conjuncture of subject, found object, place and moment.'¹¹⁸ Thus, as Belk observes, Benjamin's collecting activities actually work to imbue his objects with aura, the wider loss of which he feels so acutely. Crucially, this is achieved corporeally. Not only was the nineteenth-century collector's quest a physical one – before the time of endless scrolling through online auction sites, the collector must go out into the world to seek their things – but they reinhabit their memories through touching their objects; '[o]ne only has to watch a collector handle the objects in his glass case', Benjamin writes, '[a]s he holds them in his hands, he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired.'¹¹⁹ The collector's body, then, both makes and activates relics, giving life to auratic experiences that were subdued or suppressed in museum settings.

This ability, or perhaps inevitability, of the collecting habit, to re-sacralise its objects, providing them with new narratives and histories, has been at the root of many modern critiques of collecting. For Baudrillard, the collection is an orgy of possession in which the collector divests his objects (for it is always 'he') of all previous meanings, including their use- and exchange-values, in order to reorder them in 'his personal microcosm.'¹²⁰

Baudrillard's collector inhabits a narcissistic world of objects as it is 'invariably *oneself* that one collects.'¹²¹ Susan Stewart develops Baudrillard's argument, writing that 'the point of collecting is forgetting' – the object's contexts, histories, and environment, she writes, are 'subsumed' to 'a scenario of the personal' in the collection.¹²² These critiques

¹¹⁷ C. A. Montresor, *Some Hobby Horses and How to Ride Them* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1888), p. 193.

¹¹⁸ Roger Cardinal, 'Collecting and Collage-making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters' in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 68-96 (p. 68).

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, p. 62.

¹²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24 (p. 7).

¹²¹ Baudrillard, p. 12.

¹²² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 152, 162, 158.

are borne out of Victorian criticisms of collectors who neglect the individual histories of their objects in their pursuit of the collecting habit itself, what Stewart terms the 'replacement of content with classification'.¹²³ But such readings of collecting behaviour fail to register the multivocality of objects, to which much of Stewart's work attends most successfully. I share Thad Logan's curiosity that 'a critic so wonderfully sensitive to the multiple voices of things can ultimately flatten her assessment of them to a reiteration of the theory of commodity fetishism.'¹²⁴ For Stewart, collectors seek to construct new domains and new economies through the seriality of the collection, ultimately turning objects into mere signifiers for which the 'ultimate referent is...the interior of the self.'¹²⁵ But collecting has many more facets, as its intricate relationship with memory attests. To view collecting as merely a process of narcissistic self-articulation through bewildering, empty commodities is not only to ignore its many outward-looking guises in the sciences, but also its many iterations throughout our lives – the toys we collect as children, the more diffuse collecting through which we furnish our homes, our music or book collections as adults. Although there are doubtless processes of self-articulation at work here, these practices are also closely tied up with the workings of memory and of affect.

Nineteenth-century collectors were acutely aware of the polysemy of objects and of the accretions of memory and history which resided in matter, whether medieval antiquities or shells from the seashore. Frequently, as this chapter has shown, these affective meanings could be accessed through physical engagement with the material object. The collector's association with relichood is significant because it presents a challenge to the museum's control over the sensual means of knowledge-making. Who gets to decide what is important, is important. The relationship also suggests an alternative way to approach nineteenth-century fictions which warn the collector, 'too close!' It suggests that the

¹²³ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 160.

¹²⁴ Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 97.

¹²⁵ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 158.

collector's worrying of the categories of subject and object might be conceived of as an attempt to engage in imaginative, empathetic communion with things rather than to manipulate people. The following chapter attempts to explore this proposition through Henry James's sustained and ambiguous engagement with the figure of the collector in his fictions of the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 3 – Material Meaning in the Fiction of Henry James

In the final chapter of this section, I turn to the fiction of Henry James to explore how he approaches the fluidity between objects and bodies in the late nineteenth century through the figure of the collector. James is a writer particularly attuned to the ways in which humans use, arrange, experience, emote and communicate with objects. This chapter will consider how James addresses collecting and materiality in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), and *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897).¹ The ubiquity of collectors in James's fiction, as both minor and major characters, reflects not only how commonplace the activity had become in the late nineteenth century, but also the fascination which James held for the habit, sparked by childhood visits to The Louvre, and growing as his friendship with Isabella Stewart Gardner developed throughout his life.² Readings of James's fictional collectors, as this chapter explores, have tended to reproduce the prevalent nineteenth-century view that collectors who get 'too close' to their objects, conferring on them the affect which should be reserved for fellow humans, pose a risk to wider societal relations. Certainly, some of the most famous of James's collectors, Gilbert Osmond and Adam Verver, invite this reading, as they deploy collecting behaviours – acquisition, arrangement, and display – in human contexts. But James's interest in different modes of making stories and histories, and his sensitivity to the various textures and qualities of human encounters with material objects, mean that his portrayals of collectors are more nuanced and subtle than they may at first appear.

¹ The dates given refer to the original dates of publication for each of these works, although the editions used here all reproduce the New York Editions, published between 1907 and 1909. James made revisions to his works for the New York Editions, mostly addressing clarity and tone, and these are the versions generally in use. He also wrote a series of prefaces for the texts.

² Gardner (1840-1924) was a great collector and patron of the arts. She opened her collection in Boston, Massachusetts to the public for the first time in 1903. She and James corresponded a great deal, although rarely about collecting itself, which is perhaps strange given their shared interest in the topic. See a recent edition of their correspondence, *Letters to Isabella Stewart Gardner*, ed. by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (London: Pushkin Press, 2009).

Osmond and Verver constitute only two of the many guises through which James probes collecting and other material practices. This chapter explores James's changing approach to collectors in his fiction, situating it within the context of museum culture by suggesting that James's novels work through the possibilities and limitations of different modes of interacting with the material world. Tangible materiality – in the form of buildings, furnishings, books and bowls – is intrinsic to James's intricate renderings of human relationships, and the habits, movements, and emotions of his characters in relation to these things constitute a probing of their status in relation to questions of human ontology. The questions posed in chapters one and two of this thesis – what does it mean if we only look, not touch? Can material things help us to 'feel' our way to other forms of knowledge? – are confronted by Jamesian collectors. James is responsive to objects' status as commodities, but always alert to their polysemy, as he writes objects that are variously communicative, metonymic, performative, mute, and, irreducibly material, smashed to pieces. Collecting appears in his fiction as a prism through which these multiple ways that we can make objects mean are explored.

It would be too much to suggest that James's writings constitute a worked-through theory of collecting or position on the activity as a whole. There are 23 years between the publication of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*, and James approaches the material practice of collecting differently in each of these works. Sergio Perosa, tracing James's depictions of collectors from the well-meaning Roderick Hudson to the American ransacker Adam Verver, suggests that by the time he wrote *The Golden Bowl*, James had developed an unremittingly bleak view of collecting, determined in part by the large-scale movement of artworks from Britain to America which occurred during the late nineteenth

century and which was precipitated by wealthy American collectors.³ But any consideration of James and the material world must attend to his interest in and sensitivity to the multiple ways that objects mean – not only as possessions, but as carriers of and stimulants to memory, emotion, and feeling, as transmitters of our ‘loves and patiences...tricks and triumphs.’⁴ James writes all kinds of collectors, from literary biographers driven to acquire a single rare item, to connoisseurs assembling arrays of choice objects, to those who gather, magpie-like, odd things which strike their fancy. Most of his literary disdain is indeed heaped upon American collectors who ransack Europe’s treasures; collectors on a less grand scale receive a treatment altogether more ambiguous. Caroline Patey has convincingly attempted to reappraise the Jamesian collector, identifying a certain sympathy toward collections in James’s work that has tended to go mostly unnoticed by critics. Patey suggests that James’s portrayals of collectors are attempts to work through the creative potential of the practice.⁵ She draws parallels between his approach to the literary work and the operation of spaces which display collections; for James, she writes, ‘one enters a museum as one does a novel, following itineraries that have been selected and contrived by the author/curator to produce effect and meanings’, concluding that ‘James’s dimly lit galleries and eclectic collectors reveal his dislike of the straight routes found in the classically oriented museums and reaffirm his fondness for a slow pace, winding deviations and superposition of planes in narrative, all aspects which somehow delineate elements for a theory of the novel.’⁶ Patey identifies in James’s characters’ relative ease in the spaces of private collections an echo of the author’s famous style, a shared rejection of linearity which speaks to the concerns of this thesis

³ Sergio Perosa, ‘Henry James and Unholy Art Acquisitions’, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37:1 (2008), 150-63. Perosa suggests that James’ friendship with Gardner suffered due to her position within this market.

⁴ Henry James, *The Spoils of Poynton*, ed. by Bernard Richards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 38. Further references to this edition appear in line with the text.

⁵ Caroline Patey, ‘Chapters Hanging on the Wall: Henry James in the Art Gallery’, in *The Exhibit in the Text: The Museological Practices of Literature*, ed. by Caroline Patey and Laura Scuriatti (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 85-103 (p. 93). The creative potential of collecting for modernist writers and artists is explored in Jeremy Braddock’s recent *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012).

⁶ Patey, pp. 90, 100.

with alternatives to historical museum narratives. My readings of James's historiography as articulated, in part, through his fiction's approach to both collecting and relichood, complement Patey's arguments. In what follows, I explore how James stages encounters with relics, which provoke the experience of overlapping temporality that Patey describes and which might be considered, as we have seen, as the material means of constructing an alternative, imaginative historiography.

Stephen D. Arata's critical work on *The Golden Bowl* also registers the impact of burgeoning museum culture upon James's work.⁷ Arata explores 'the role played by the fine-arts museum in shaping perception',⁸ reading the development in Maggie Verver's hermeneutics, which make up almost all of book two of the novel, as reflective of the way in which American discourse on the value of the art object changes in the final decades of the nineteenth century. According to Arata, discussions about the value of public artworks shift in this period from an emphasis on the artwork's ability to embody a series of timeless or eternal truths, to more careful considerations of the artwork's unique material authenticity. Hence objects' histories take on a new importance in the American art museum – casts and copies are banished to the storeroom. Arata frames this change in perspective as a shift from form to content, or the supplanting of 'reified qualities – culture, learning, beauty, truth' – by objects' stories and individual histories,⁹ reading Maggie's changed status as a perceiver of information in the second part of the novel as analogous to this museal shift. For Arata, James ultimately leaves the reader of *The Golden Bowl* with a sense of the failure of a sensibility which merely attends to the surface's appropriable characteristics. Maggie's achievement is that she comes to 'a recognition of others as unappropriable, inviolable human beings' – not that humans are not objects, but

⁷ Stephen D. Arata, 'Object Lessons: Reading the Museum in *The Golden Bowl*', in *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. by Alison Booth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 199-229.

⁸ Arata, p. 200.

⁹ Arata, p. 204.

that both objects and humans might be best approached through their individual and irreplaceable histories: through a 'deep' rather than 'surface' engagement.¹⁰ As relics, not signs.

Arata's work, which places the museum and the museal gaze at the centre of its interpretive framework, is significant and necessary to our reassessments of Jamesian collectors. I agree with his view that *The Golden Bowl* should be read as an exploration of how context and personal history might be the means to constitute a more empathetic encounter with objects and humans. Early on in the novel, Prince Amerigo sets out the text's concern with knowledges either simply read or deeply felt, describing how two qualitatively distinct histories exist within him simultaneously.

There are two parts of me... [o]ne is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies...[t]hose things are written – literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've both of you wonderfully looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant...personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing.¹¹

The Golden Bowl is the story of Maggie's coming into possession of a kind of knowledge that is beyond being easily 'looked in the face', checked in an archive, or glanced at on the page. The mysterious 'unknown', 'personal' 'part' of Amerigo which she eventually discovers is accessed through the eponymous bowl. Hilary Margo Schor notes how in the novel, the bowl functions precisely as space- and time-binding relic; when the shopkeeper

¹⁰ Arata, p. 210.

¹¹ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. by Ruth Bernard Yeazell (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 31. All further references to this edition will appear in line with the text.

comes to her house, and Maggie finds her suspicions about Amerigo and Charlotte's affair confirmed, her conviction arrives 'with a single, haunted object. Time and space have to collapse for the bowl to testify against its admirers: the moment of the first visit to the shop must be superimposed upon the second.'¹² Despite Charlotte Stant's protest that the bowl, bought as a keepsake, would be a 'ricordo of nothing', with 'no reference' (104), it comes to refer, from the moment that she examines it, 'holding it up in both her fine hands, turning it to the light' (107), to that very occasion of her outing with Amerigo. The bowl's materiality is crucial to its ability to accrue meanings and it is this which Arata fails to register: that in James's fiction, it is so often matter's surface which, through virtue of its ability to be touched, gives characters access to the 'deep' information of the object's intimate history. Touch is central to the 'vital imaginative empathy' which, for Arata, is the cornerstone of Maggie's perceptual development, and, as this chapter explores, it is frequently positioned in James's work as a challenge to the kinds of knowledge which visual perception generates.¹³

James's fictions certainly articulate a frustration with the visual cultures of the nineteenth century. Despite his childhood fondness for museum settings, James's work registers an increasing awareness of their deficiencies, so that it is Adam Verver's museum project that appears as an object of derision, not his collecting habits, which he has merely 'had to believe he liked' in order to fulfil 'the supreme idea' of presenting 'civilization condensed' (131, 132). It is Verver's encyclopaedic and educative plan, 'a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land' which the novel seems to offer up to our scorn, not his collections themselves (132). An awareness of the limitations of the museum's pedagogical project informs James's fiction as he thinks through the epistemological possibilities of

¹² Hilary Margo Schor, 'Reading Knowledge: Curiosity in *The Golden Bowl*', *The Henry James Review*, 26:3 (2005), 237-45 (p. 242).

¹³ Arata, p. 210.

different modes of perception. Jonathan Freedman suggests that James pays attention to hands and touch 'in ways that challenge the grim logic of...discourse-shaping ocularcentrism.'¹⁴ For James was acutely aware of how the power of touching objects could open up other interpretative and imaginative fields outside of the unilateral story that the museal gaze enforced.

There has been a spate of research in recent years that has taken James' use of touch in his fiction as its subject; for a writer for whom so much interest lies in what remains unsaid and inarticulate in our social relations, the deployment of both the gaze and the body provides a rich seam of nonverbal possibility to explore.¹⁵ James's narrative technique relies so much on nuance and ellipsis that analysis of the very deliberate use of touch and touching in his fiction can enrich our understanding of his portrayal of the silent forms of communication between individuals. His writing foregrounds the body's relationship to the material world as important in the questions he raises about perception, communication and history: as Philip Horne has noted, James's idea of the past is 'highly sensory, indeed, often tactile'.¹⁶ In James's fiction, encounters between individuals and historical material frequently engage the sense of touch and detail the movements of the body, suggesting his continued interest in the forms of tactile knowledge which nineteenth-century museum culture attempted to shut down.

In *The Phenomenology of Henry James*, Paul Armstrong offers an account of James's outlook on the sensuous ways that knowledge might be approached, although he does not explicitly mention how touch figures in James's writings. Armstrong asks what the relation

¹⁴ Jonathan Freedman, 'Hands, Objects, and Love in James and Hitchcock: Reading the Touch in *The Golden Bowl* and *Notorious*', in *The Men who Knew Too Much: Henry James and Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. by Susan M. Griffin and Alan Nadel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 124-41 (p. 125).

¹⁵ See Freedman, 'Hands, Objects, and Love'; Thomas J. Otten, *A Superficial Reading of Henry James: Preoccupations with the Material World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006). Susan M. Griffin contextualises James's theory of vision and perception in *The Historical Eye: The Texture of the Visual in Late James* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Philip Horne, "'A Palpable Imaginable Visitable Past": Henry James and the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 32:2 (2008), 14-28 (p. 14).

is 'between James's understanding of consciousness and phenomenological theories of knowing?'¹⁷ For Armstrong, James's fictions link him closely to the phenomenological theories of not only his brother William, but also of other thinkers such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty because his fictions so frequently dramatise the difficulty of knowing the Other. These crises of transparency are a recurrent theme throughout James's work, in which true or complete understanding between people is figured as an ideal state. *The Portrait of a Lady* provides some good examples.¹⁸ Verbal communication frequently breaks down in the novel; Isabel's heartbreaking return to the cruel Osmond in Italy is enabled by her failure to communicate her heart to Caspar Goodwood. Her verbal response to his proposal is entirely at odds with what she feels; to his claim that the world, in its size and scope, can accommodate the inevitable scandal of their love, she replies "'the world's very small" ...she said it at random, to hear herself say something; but it was not what she meant' (489). Her dealings with Osmond are even more fractured and troublesome. The emotional intensity of Isabel's eventual confrontation with her husband is caused at least in part by the sense of just how long she had been 'perpetually, in their talk, hanging out curtains and arranging screens' (364). True empathy, the communion of souls, James appears to posit, needs no words; on Ralph Touchett's deathbed Isabel tells him that '[w]e needn't speak to understand each other' (479), and it is significant that the pivotal moment of insight into her husband's too-familiar relationship with Madam Merle is a glimpse of a pose, a pose which reveals that they had 'the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them' (343). This inimitable intimacy is a fulfilment of the 'dream of direct communication from soul to soul' to which James's fictions so frequently return.¹⁹

¹⁷ Paul B. Armstrong, *The Phenomenology of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 4.

¹⁸ *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. by Robert D. Bamberg, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1995). References to this edition will appear in line with the text.

¹⁹ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 37.

The Portrait of a Lady is also a fine example of James's ambiguous representation of the acquisitory habit. Gilbert Osmond is a consummate collector who views both things and people as potential acquisitions that he might arrange according to his will. His 'genius for upholstery' (324) is a talent for surface and concealment, revealing the central driving force behind his actions as nothing more substantial than the 'observance of a magnificent form' (446). It is in the service of form that Osmond manipulates people, ignoring their unique subjectivity for appearance's sake. In this single-minded and display-oriented character we might read a Jamesian critique of the collecting habit, for Osmond's propensity to coldly deal with the deployment and arrangement of people, regardless of their own desires and agency, appears to be a continuation of his collecting activities. Osmond's love rival Ralph Touchett notes that 'one ought to feel one's relation to things — to others. I don't think Mr. Osmond does that' (291). Ralph's slippage, the extension of 'things' to 'others', of object-feeling to human-feeling, reveals that in the world of the novel, relationships with inanimate material things act as a precursor to, or a training ground for, relationships with humans. Osmond's habit of referring to people as objects is a demonstration of this principle and a symptom of his acquisitory and appropriating outlook; Henrietta Stackpole is 'a new steel pen' (409), Caspar Goodwood 'an English portmanteau' (412), and Isabel 'a silver plate...that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value' (296). Osmond is that most terrible and typical of late-Victorian collectors; one for whom the desire to possess and acquire has extended from the realm of objects into the world of subjects; he pursues Isabel because he is attracted to 'the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects' (258). Jean-Christophe Agnew has influentially argued that the permeation of the language of acquisition into even Osmond's closest attachments is an indicator of how human relationships are recast as proprietary bonds in commodity culture, as 'feeling and perception were restructured to accommodate the ubiquity and

liquidity of the commodity form.’²⁰ Following Agnew, it has become common to read in *The Portrait of a Lady* a condemnation of collecting which sees the practice as the most abstract manifestation of a commodity culture in which all qualities of things are subordinate to market- or exchange-value.²¹ It matters because collecting is not benign – as Osmond illustrates, it can act as a training-ground for social relationships, a precursor to a mode of experiencing all the world and its people as appropriable beings, ‘marketplace identit[ies]’ which, evacuated of all intrinsic qualities, derive their value only in relation to others.²²

It is important to note, however, as Bill Brown does, that the ubiquity with which all of James’s characters refer to each other as objects or pieces for collection and appreciation demonstrates that proprietary relationships have become ‘an inescapable human condition’.²³ Osmond’s conflation of human with object is not the exception, but the rule; the ‘consuming vision’ is not particular to collectors. Brown, in his extended studies of the ‘things’ of James’s fictions, counsels against understanding *The Portrait of a Lady* in terms of ‘a simple materialist/antimaterialist binary’: ²⁴ Madame Merle is a collector too, and Edward Rosier, and Ralph Touchett – in fact, James stages the entire action of the novel amongst a community of collectors, their moral centres as multitudinous as any other group of characters in his novels. Touchett, collector of ‘snuff boxes’ and ‘*bric-à-brac*’ (171; 126), shares with Osmond, as Isabel notes, the ‘appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship’ (225). Edward Rosier appraises humans using the tools of the collector, an ‘eye for decorative character’ and an ‘instinct for authenticity’, but displays a

²⁰ Jean-Christophe Agnew, ‘The Consuming Vision of Henry James’, in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. by Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp. 65-100 (pp. 67, 68).

²¹ See, for example, Rémy G. Saisselin, who writes that Osmond is extending his ‘collector’s instinct’ to include Isabel (*Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 61).

²² Agnew, p. 85.

²³ Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 156.

²⁴ Bill Brown, ‘Jamesian Matter’, in *A Companion to Henry James*, ed. by Greg W. Zacharias (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 292-308 (p. 294).

sensitivity to ineffable qualities which Gilbert Osmond lacks: 'a sense for uncatalogued values, for that secret of a "lustre" beyond any recorded losing or rediscovering' (309). James's collectors are more than capable of deep feeling, as Rosier and Touchett demonstrate. This broad cast of characters all pursuing collections demonstrates how saturated society was with the practice by the late nineteenth century. Madame Merle's famous speech acts as an important indicator for how we must read the novel: in terms of people's relations to things.

There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us - and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for *things*! One's self — for other people — is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps — these things are all expressive. (175)

We might read Merle's pronouncement as a statement of the invidiousness of the commodity form, a presage to William James's declaration in 1890 that 'a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account.'²⁵ Merle and James's statements are declarations of the possessive self and markers of commodity culture, certainly, but they are also suggestive of the fluidity of the boundaries between the body and its things. They claim that we are instilled in our things, and them in us. Madame Merle's 'flow' of selfhood into things and back out of them describes the processes and beliefs that underpin relic culture, suggesting an alternative way that we might read the thing culture

²⁵ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1977), p. 188.

of the novel, as saturated with affect and imaginative potential. A 'great respect for *things*' ought not always be read as a moral failing. Indeed, through his portrayal of Isabel Archer's historical sensibility, James explores how a close and affective relation to things might be cultivated and used.

If the collection is a training ground for the emotions, it would be inaccurate to suggest that James views a training in the object world as always precipitative of an unfeeling and manipulative outlook. Isabel's education and aesthetic sensibilities are fostered at her grandmother's house, located over the road from a primary school which she had tried out and rejected, having 'protested against its laws' (32). From the filial home, Isabel hears the children reciting their multiplication tables, learned by rote, which provides a stark, aural contrast to the tactile and self-directed education she pursues in a room of discarded furnishings - referred to, 'traditionally', as 'the office' (33), but actually in effect a lumber room.²⁶ In the office, Isabel educates herself by reading books which she brings from the adjacent library, climbing on a chair to retrieve them, 'guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece' (33). Isabel thus directs her education with these pasted-in frontispieces, markers of ownership and of the material history of the object, which allow her to identify, and tangibly connect her to, the book's previous owner or owners. There are other things in the room, too, which contribute to the cultivation of her firmly material-based historical consciousness.

Whose office it had been and at what period it had flourished, she never learned; it was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture whose infirmities were not always apparent (so that the disgrace seemed unmerited and rendered them victims of injustice) and with which, in the manner of children, she had established

²⁶ I explore the significance of the lumber room in Victorian fiction in chapter six of this thesis.

relations almost human, certainly dramatic. There was an old haircloth sofa in especial, to which she had confided a hundred childish sorrows. (33)

The 'echo' and 'pleasant musty smell' that the room contains act as markers of its age and continued neglect, comforting Isabel and appealing to her sense of history (33). She develops a sympathy with the discarded furniture that fills the office and, although she never discovers the history of the room and its contents, Isabel's attentions to the objects provide her with a source of comfort and delight. The replacement of humans with things which Isabel enacts here is qualitatively different from that which her to-be husband plays out later, and its effects are correspondingly opposite. Isabel takes these objects into her confidence and develops a secret sympathy, a reciprocity, with them.

In an exchange with her Aunt Lydia that takes place in the sympathetic surroundings of the office, Isabel elaborates on her attraction to her grandmother's house, and James pointedly positions it as both the site of her affective, aesthetic training and a precursor to her experiences in Italy:

"I like places in which things have happened—even if they're sad things. A great many people have died here; the place has been full of life."

"Is that what you call being full of life?"

"I mean full of experience—of people's feelings and sorrows. And not of their sorrows only, for I've been very happy here as a child."

"You should go to Florence if you like houses in which things have happened—especially deaths." (35-36)

Isabel is to encounter many places 'full of experience' in Europe, and indeed, proves herself particularly attuned to the way that places can connect us to others' emotional history. The reader is frequently treated to rich descriptions of Isabel's emotional and

imaginative flights as she wanders about the ruins of Italy; 'enter[ing] into relation with certain of the mustiest relics of [Rome's] old society' and feeling 'the touch of a vanished world' (330; 431). She dutifully visits the galleries and palaces, and is accordingly moved and educated where appropriate, but the more humdrum sites provide the most opportunities for flights of the imagination: a scrubby path, or the wheel-worn streets. To live in Mrs Touchett's out-of-the-way, historic home, she finds, is 'to hold to her ear all day a shell of the sea of the past' (212). Isabel 'had always been fond of history, and here was history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine' (245); for her, the buildings of Rome act as material markers of moments long lost to time. The contemplation of them, and the physical nearness of her body to these sites of history, 'strongly moved her'; 'she had an imagination that kindled at the mention of great deeds, and wherever she turned some great deed had been acted' (245). Isabel is moved by Rome's relics to contemplate history affectively, not to recall sequences of dates or names but to imaginatively engage with the stone streets and buildings, 'full of experience' as they are.

Specifically, this involves an imagined affinity with the emotional lives of the historic inhabitants of Rome, the traces of whose loves and losses still cling, perceptibly for Isabel, to the city itself. She finds comfort in the multitudes of individuals who must have suffered their own agonies in the same surroundings, the 'rugged relics of the Roman past...in which the corrosion of centuries had still left so much of individual life' (246). It is these traces of 'individual life' which so affect her, as 'her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world' (41). The city's antiquities provide her with material means through which to imagine herself as a part of a vast historical community, so that she is comforted by sharing in the imagined sorrows of individuals who have shared her spatial specificity in the past. This is the power that is aptly evoked by Durham-Peters' description of the 'time-binding' relic - the connection of individuals across history through material means. Isabel, then, uses the

capacity of material to carry the trace of experience as a means of connecting, affectively, with history; the moving power of relics does not only lead her thoughts inward, but outward, too, as 'her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater' (430). Isabel's training in the lumber room has enabled her to cultivate a relationship with the material world in which the accretions of history provoke imaginative, historical contemplation on a personal level. Of course, in a novel populated by collectors, James's most historically sensitive and materially sympathetic character is distinguished by her non-participation in that activity. James certainly conveys, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, a scepticism toward the material practice of collecting, but the novel does suggest a way of reconceiving of the supposedly dangerous fluidity between human and object world which the collector too keenly feels. Isabel's sensitivity to the histories and emotional import of matter suggests that at this point, James is thinking through the meanings of relic culture and the generative potential of knowledge constructed through the body.

James's next substantial engagement with the figure of the collector was published seven years after *The Portrait of a Lady*. *The Aspern Papers* first appeared in three parts in *The Atlantic Monthly* throughout 1888, before being issued as a book the same year.²⁷ The novella is narrated by an editor, a man of letters who, in order to gain access to the private correspondence of long-dead poet Jeffrey Aspern, ingratiates himself into the household of an elderly woman, Miss Juliana Bordereau, who was once Aspern's lover. Living with Miss Bordereau in Venice is her niece, Tina, with whom the narrator forms an alliance in his attempts to establish what relics of Aspern the elderly aunt may possess, before he attempts, in a climactic scene, to steal them from her chambers. *The Aspern Papers* is a story about histories - how they are made, who can construct them, how we access them, and what is omitted from them. The narrator falsifies his own history to gain access to the

²⁷ Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and the Turn of the Screw* ed. by Anthony Curtis (London: Penguin, 1986). Further references to this edition will appear in line with the text.

Bordereau house, giving himself a *nom de guerre* which, along with his real name, the reader never learns. He is an ambiguous figure, a scholar who professes to be dedicated to the uncovering of historical truths, yet simultaneously a collector in the grip of a desire for material objects which bear the trace of his hero's touch. This tension, as we will see, constitutes a development in James's portrayal of a disposition sensitive to the affective power of mute objects in *The Portrait of a Lady* as he begins to explore how such tendencies in the collector might affect the construction of historical narrative.

Alison Booth writes that *The Aspern Papers* forms part of a group of James's works which constitute 'astute satires of the consumption of authors' lives, remains, and locales'.²⁸ For Booth, James's works which deal with the material constituents of literary biography are best understood in the context of the author's own dislike for the 'literary snooping' which had become a Victorian pastime, and indeed *The Aspern Papers'* descriptions of the narrator's work in this field are written with a lightly ironic hand.²⁹ As the architects of much of Aspern's posthumous success, the narrator claims that he and his colleague have improved the poet's standing 'simply by opening lights into his life' (47). 'He had nothing to fear from us because he had nothing to fear from the truth, which alone', he says, 'at such a distance of time we could be interested in establishing' (47). James is mocking the pomposity of the literary scholar as he reveals the editor's 'critical work' to be a hagiography which, he believes, only he could construct, purging all blemishes from Aspern's history and narrating the details of a deity-like life, hanging 'high in the heaven of our literature for all the world to see' (46). That such a biographical history might provide some insight into Aspern's poetry is a proudly-held assumption of the narrator.³⁰ In a

²⁸ Alison Booth, 'The Real Right Place of Henry James: Homes and Haunts', *The Henry James Review*, 25:3 (2004), 216-27 (p. 216).

²⁹ Booth, p. 225. It is unclear whether Booth appreciates the irony of this claim or not.

³⁰ An assumption shared, J. Hillis Miller points out, by much of literary studies, indeed, the academy as a whole, even today. See, 'History, Narrative and Responsibility: Speech Acts in Henry James's 'The Aspern Papers'', *Textual Practice*, 9:2 (1995), 243-67.

revealing conversation with Juliana early on in the story, he is rebuked for his faith in the purpose and utility of the literary biographer's historical researches;

'Oh I like the past, but I don't like critics,' my hostess declared with her hard complacency.

'Neither do I, but I like their discoveries.'

'Aren't they mostly lies?'

'The lies are what they sometimes discover,' I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. 'They often lay bare the truth.'

'The truth is God's, it isn't man's: we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it? — who can say?'

'We're terribly in the dark, I know,' I admitted; 'but if we give up trying what becomes of all the fine things? What becomes of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It's all vain words if there's nothing to measure it by.' (106)

The narrator's faith in the ability of literary biography to shine a light on the work of 'the great philosophers and poets' testifies to his assumption that such creative work can be regarded as an 'output' which results from some combination of events in the artist's life. This assumption is based upon belief in the universal existence of unilateral narratives of progress which inevitably imply causal relationships: the author's life is the cause, the poetry, the effect. For the narrator, the content of the letters which he hopes are in Juliana's possession might further illuminate the 'vain words' of Aspern's poetry, useless without some moral yardstick against which they might be 'measured'. As J. Hillis Miller notes, in *The Aspern Papers*, James calls into question the very project of the discovery of historical 'truth' through recourse to the facts of biography by probing the assumption that 'the truth about a set of historical events...is inside the evidence and can by proper procedures be penetrated, reached, decoded, revealed, unveiled, and triumphantly brought out into the open where all may see it and where it may be told as a coherent

narrative.’³¹ For Miller, the narrator fails ultimately on two counts. Firstly, to obtain the information contained in the Aspern papers, and secondly, to understand that even with that knowledge, he could never have known what he wanted to know. That is, he fails to understand that ‘history...cannot be objectively known.’³² Miller’s recognition of the text’s perspective on historical ‘truth’ has been important in developing my own reading, but where Miller understands the crux of the novella’s stance on history as located in the opportunity for the narrator to ‘learn’ through recreating the relationship between Aspern and Juliana with the younger generation of the Bordereau family, I read the tension between conflicting ways of constructing historical truth as residing in the narrator himself and his different modes of sensual cognition. For Miller, the tale indicates that a ‘true historical event...does not belong to the order of cognition’ but ‘to the order of performative acts’, indicating James’s faith in ways of knowing which fall outside the unilateral narratives favoured by the scholarly academy and, I would add, the museum. In what follows, therefore, I extend Miller’s analysis through an attendance to the way that James approaches the status of the relic in the story, positioning its knowledge as encoded corporeally, inaccessible through vision. In so doing I elaborate on how the story articulates, as Miller suggests, the existence of two kinds of knowledge, one ‘obtained from historical research or from seeing something with one’s own eyes’, and the other, ‘that blind bodily material kind that cannot be narrated.’³³ This analysis shows how the dissonance between relic culture and museum imperatives is brought to bear in James’s fiction.

In the 1908 preface to *The Aspern Papers*, James writes that whilst living in Florence he had heard that Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley’s step-sister and Byron’s former lover, had until recently been resident in the city. James was clearly affected by this knowledge. He

³¹ Miller, pp. 256-57.

³² Miller, p. 243.

³³ Ibid.

had missed the opportunity to meet her as she had died in 1879, but this, he mused, was probably for the better, as 'the minimum of valid suggestion serve[s] the man of imagination better than the maximum' (29). 'The thrill of learning that she had 'overlapped', and by so much', he writes, 'and the wonder of my having doubtless at several earlier seasons passed again and again, all unknowing, the door of her house, where she sat above, within call and in her habit as she lived, these things gave me all I wanted' (29). The 'thrill' and 'wonder' of having unknowingly been so close to Clairmont was both scant and sufficient enough to give rise to his imagination. This is typical of James's attitude to the relationship between novelistic freedom and history; '[t]he historian,' he writes, 'essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take' (29). Too many facts impede the imagination; far more stimulating are inscrutable objects, fragments which force an imaginative engagement through their unwillingness or inability to disclose fully their histories. 'Nine-tenths of the artist's interest in [facts] is that of what he shall add to them and how he shall turn them' (30), James writes: he saw his task as the application of the imagination to history, not the faithful recreation of it. Thus he viewed attempts at the literary reconstruction of history, such as those Walter Scott had embarked on earlier in the century, as folly.³⁴ As Peter Rawlings has argued, James was 'in the business of appropriation rather than affiliation', having a tendency to take the 'facts' of history and subject them to the full elaboration of his historical imagination.³⁵ Rawlings calls James's 1884 essay 'The Art of Fiction' 'an impassioned insistence on the imperative of novelistic freedom and, thereby, an emphatic repudiation of positivist history and its law-seeking proclivities.'³⁶ We might understand, then, James's apparent sympathy with Aspern's editor in light of this repudiation - the quest for relics, after all, constitutes a challenge to the laws of positivist historiography.

³⁴ See Horne, pp. 17-18.

³⁵ Peter Rawlings, *Henry James and the Abuse of the Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 6.

³⁶ Rawlings, p. 4.

The preface to *The Aspern Papers* also foregrounds the story's interest in the importance of material history, not to act as evidence for the truth, or otherwise, of historical events but, through its sensuous properties, as a stimulus for the historical imagination. In an oft-quoted passage, James elaborates on the power of material to connect us with history.

I delight in a palpable imaginable *visitable* past - in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table. The table is the one, the common expanse, and where we lean, so stretching, we find it firm and continuous.

(31)

The analogy of the table is carefully chosen. In its solidity, it acts as a material bridge between one time and another. Just as the table does, relics and all aged objects, by virtue of their historical origins and 'firm and continuous' materiality, make history palpable, visitable, and graspable. James goes on to describe how the 'closeness' of the near past attracts him, with just the right balance of 'strange' and 'familiar', 'telling so of connexions but tasting so of differences' (31-32). Clairmont's 'overlapping' presence in Italy, then, was bound to appeal to James, as it 'testified for the reality and the closeness of our relation to the past' (29). His own unknowing physical proximity to a person who had once been in (somewhat closer, intimate) physical proximity to Shelley suggested a degree of relation between Shelley's time and his own, a continuity which enabled an imagined sympathy between one man and the next. What so struck James was that 'there had been, so to speak, a forward continuity, from the actual man, the divine poet, on', and his aim became 'to throw it backward again, to compress - squeezing it hard! - the connexion that had drawn itself out, and convert so the stretched relation into a value of nearness on our own part' (31). In this description of his literary aims we might also read James's

understanding of the power of relics themselves - a 'continuity', 'compressed' into a 'nearness.'

As it was, the story of Clairmont's proximity provided the germ for the tale, as did the true story of the attentions she received from Edward Silsbee, an American Shelley scholar whose longing to possess some relics of the poet led him to Italy, and into the house of the elderly Clairmont. Despite the ironic tone with which *The Aspern Papers* treats the narrator and his hagiographical ambitions, James clearly felt an affinity with Silsbee, calling his actions 'the mistake I should have made', had he been alert 'sooner to the question of opportunity' (30). In writing the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, James writes an inflated version of an attitude which he recognises in himself: the belief that presences can haunt and inhabit matter, whether that be letters, guitars, or places, and that in sharing our material world with that matter, whether by handling it or walking its halls, we might gain access to those presences.³⁷ Ahead of its reissue in the 1908 New York Editions of his work, James made several changes to *The Aspern Papers* which emphasise the papers' status as objects, suggesting that James wanted to make it clear that the editor's driving concern is the material tangibility of the Aspern correspondence, rather than its content.³⁸ For the editor, the value of the letters lies in their relic-hood, not the information they contain; indeed it is the possibility of 'the possession of mementoes, of tangible objects' which brings him, in the first place, to the Bordereau house (51). The choice of terms - 'mementoes' and 'tangible objects' - evoke love tokens or souvenirs, rather than correspondence, suggesting his interest in the materiality of objects; of form, over content. Thus, *The Aspern Papers* establishes the polysemy of the object and its

³⁷ The story of Shelley's guitar and Edward Silsbee's possession of it is told in the introduction to Judith Pascoe's *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 1-25. See also Stephen Hebron and Elizabeth C. Denlinger, *Shelley's Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2010).

³⁸ See Adrian Poole's 1983 introduction to *The Aspern Papers and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. ix, quoted in Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 194.

importance to collectors by exploring not only the futility of the discovery of the informational content of Aspern's papers, but also their status as relics.

The narrator of *The Aspern Papers* thus embarks on a futile quest to uncover the 'truth' of Aspern's history in this great 'city of exhibition' (48). James characterises this failure to know Aspern's inner life as a failure of vision. The editor attempts to penetrate the Bordereaus' residence in an intensely optical way. On his arrival in Venice, he approaches their home, 'laying siege to it with my eyes' (46), a first act of violence which foreshadows his later act of ransack. His optical intrusions continue fruitlessly. Inside the house, the editor both watches and is watched. He stares at the windows to the Bordereau apartments, and they stare right back; '[t]heir motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in the probability that, though invisible themselves, they kept me in view between the lashes' (74). Inside Juliana's chambers, he is no less modest with his gaze: 'I turned my eyes once more all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chests of drawers, the tables' (116). Juliana keeps her eyes covered with a 'green shade', 'so that from underneath it', the editor says, 'she might take me all in without my getting at herself' (60). James thus expressly constitutes vision as a mode of perception intimately imbricated with intersubjective power relations. Indeed, the editor feels uncomfortable in this veiled presence as the imbalance in their powers of vision creates a feeling of unease in him: 'the old woman remained impenetrable and her attitude worried me by suggesting that she had a fuller vision of me than I had of her' (62). Even after falling ill, her eyes are covered with muslin, and it is only in the moment of horror, when the editor is caught, about to steal the relics, that the 'everlasting curtain' is removed, and her 'extraordinary eyes' are revealed 'for the first, the last, the only time' (124-25). In this moment, Juliana and the editor literally see eye-to-eye, his true intentions finally fully revealed to her, and her suspicions of him definitively confirmed. It may be a moment of understanding, but it is not one of empathy. The editor's further blindness to Tina's desire for him is played out in the stone of Venice itself: after hearing her proposal,

he dashes out of the house in horror and some time later finds himself in the Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo, at the foot of a statue of a fifteenth-century mercenary,

staring at the triumphant captain as if he had had an oracle on his lips...[b]ut he continued to look far over my head...if he were thinking of battles and stratagems they were of a different quality from any I had to tell him of. He couldn't direct me what to do, gaze up at him as I might. (139)

These mismatched gazes dramatise, at this particular moment in the narrative, the disparity between the editor and the Bordereaus, and the failure of vision to establish any empathetic relations between them.

The repeated failures of vision to reveal anything about other subjects and objects is in contrast to the potential which *The Aspern Papers* stages for touch to bring beings into emotional sympathy with one another through space and time. That optical failures are juxtaposed so insistently with the editor's desire to touch Aspern through his relics suggests that James is thinking through the epistemological possibilities of different modes of perception. Vision, a 'distance' sense, enacts the inability to ever fully penetrate or understand the other, whereas touch is positioned as a possible way to bring one closer, in spirit or understanding, to another.³⁹ The editor repeatedly describes his quest in bodily, material terms. Juliana herself is, to him 'a relic' (60), whose 'presence seemed somehow to contain and express [Aspern's] own' (59). He repeatedly utters a yearning to touch her, speaking of 'an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a moment the hand Jeffrey Aspern had pressed' (65), and to 'feel a transmitted contact in any aged hand that his had touched' (48). His longings, channelled through the body, are focussed upon the hand, an intimate instrument of tactility and affection. In his anticipation of the Aspern

³⁹ On 'distant' and 'proximal' senses see Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1993).

relics, he proclaims that 'they were under my hand - they had not escaped me yet - and they made my life continuous, in a fashion, with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end' (73-74). The figure of speech 'under my hand' serves to underscore the importance of physical proximity in this imaginative act of 'making continuous'. Tactile apprehension of both Juliana's body and the paper relics offers a means, the editor believes, to connect with Aspern. His longings repeatedly emphasise how the sensuous perception of things has an ability to forge imaginative connections and empathies. Even Tina, he reasons, by virtue of her extended proximity to the Aspern relics, both human and non-human, might be a means to come to some knowledge of the poet: 'she had lived for years with Juliana, she had seen and handled all mementoes and - even though she was stupid - some esoteric knowledge had rubbed off on her' (74). This 'esoteric knowledge', with which the editor's 'critical heart used to thrill' (74), is transmissible through bodily contact, through 'handling' and 'rubbing'. It is what Miller calls 'that blind bodily material kind' of knowledge which cannot be seen or learned, only felt.⁴⁰ The pursuit of such knowledge, to which the tactile apprehension of material forms is so central, is not the work of a critic but is a search for bodily and spiritual communion. James's portrayal of the editor explicitly figures him as an architect of history, but as a collector of relics his dealings with 'phantoms and dust, the mere echoes of echoes' (48), are closer to necromancy than to research.

He never succeeds, however, in laying his hands on Aspern's relics, as his attempt to steal them is interrupted. Later, Tina informs him that she has burned them, 'one by one, in the kitchen' (142). Their obliteration, as Millicent Bell suggests, confirms that one story or perspective must always remain obscure, and therefore reiterates historical truth's ultimate inaccessibility.⁴¹ The denouement therefore constitutes a questioning of the importance of the documentary, and an affirmation of the necessity of the artistic

⁴⁰ Miller, p. 259.

⁴¹ Bell, p. 191.

imagination in the making of history. Ultimately, despite his sympathy to the editor's longings, in *The Aspern Papers* James writes a collector whose desire for physical proximity to his objects is threatening and counterproductive to successful human relations. Although Aspern's editor displays none of the commodity fetishism of Gilbert Osmond and his community of collectors, he is too close to his things. But examining the tale through the material practices of relic culture illustrates that it takes seriously the possibilities of tactile epistemologies, how bodies might strive for, or even achieve, a silent communion with other beings through time and space.

Where *The Aspern Papers* is a story about the quest for possession, James's most sustained study of the figure of the collector is structured around the struggle to retain possession of an already-complete collection. His 1897 novella *The Spoils of Poynton* features the elderly collector Adela Gereth, who, having spent a lifetime assembling the fine collection in her home at Poynton with her now-deceased husband, is guardian of the house and its contents until such time that her son, Owen, marries. Much to Mrs Gereth's horror, Owen's intended is Mona Brigstock, who appears to have no 'sort of feeling for nice old things' (20). With her young friend Fleda Vetch, a woman who shares her sense of the fine and beautiful, Mrs Gereth embarks on a duplicitous and often silent battle with Owen over the future of Poynton and its collections. At the crux of the drama of *The Spoils of Poynton* is a problem of inheritance created by the English law of primogeniture which dictates that Mrs Gereth may only play the role of temporary caretaker for the material world she has co-constructed. The novel revolves around the resulting wrangles over the fate of the 'spoils', their own referent framing them as the winnings of a great battle.

Mrs Gereth's singlemindedness and absorbing passion for the collection is typical of Victorian portrayals of narcissistic collectors. She has few friends, and her passion for the things destroys her relationship with her son. As Fleda becomes her confidante and co-conspirator, she too finds her social life diminished, as Mrs Gereth 'had made a desert

round her, possessing and absorbing her so utterly that other partakers had fallen away' (98). Living closely amongst her collections, she cares for them above all else; 'the sum of the world' for her is 'rare French furniture and oriental china' (16). Like Osmond and the cast of collectors in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Mrs Gereth's language is infused with the logic of commodity culture. She calls Fleda 'a bit of furniture', 'quite one of my best finds' (169). Her physical world and inner life are saturated with material objects; she has a 'strange, almost maniacal disposition to thrust in everywhere the question of 'things', to read all behaviour in the light of some fancied relation to them' (16). Many critics have read in James's portrayal of Mrs Gereth an exemplary critique of nineteenth-century collecting practices.⁴² Paul Armstrong, for example, writes that 'Mrs. Gereth's collection at Poynton is itself an act of power over others' powers of self-objectification...[she] does not make the things herself but collects them, which is to control the self-expressions of others and to put them to the service of her own project of creating an identity'.⁴³ Armstrong's view that *objets d'art*, as the products of individual or collective creative labour, have that labour value erased or obscured through their inclusion in Poynton's collections, echoes Susan Stewart's work on the poetics of the collection. Stewart writes that collecting celebrates the false labour of acquisition as 'the collector constructs a narrative of luck which replaces the narrative of production.'⁴⁴ In Armstrong and Stewart's Marxist critique, the work of original producers is completely effaced by the assemblage, which refers only internally, to the collector themselves. Mrs Gereth's genius has been to arrange her objects so that they 'speak', and constitute a 'record of a life', 'written in great syllables of colour and form, the tongues of other countries and the hands of rare artists' (14). The collection

⁴² See Laurence Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 92. Julia Prewitt-Brown writes that 'Mrs Gereth's passion for objects has reduced her capacity to feel to little more than a maniacal protectiveness for the things of Poynton' (*The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 94.)

⁴³ Armstrong, p. 196.

⁴⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 165.

can thus be understood as a feast of ownership, 'the most abstract of all forms of consumption' in which objects' histories are erased in service of the collector's aims.⁴⁵

But while *The Spoils of Poynton* stages possession at its heart, it also frequently asks us to explore different modes of human-object relations. One of the ways that it does this is through a rejection of ekphrasis with regard to the collected objects themselves. In the 1908 preface, James attributes the scant description of Poynton's interiors to the demands of the marketplace; 'no vigilant editor', he writes, would allow room for the sumptuous and lengthy passages that would be required (xlv). Jean-Christophe Agnew, following Marx, suggests that this serves to enforce their status as commodities: part of the process of making a thing into a commodity, writes Marx, is the obfuscation of its use value, and this involves putting 'its existence as a material thing...out of sight'.⁴⁶ To conceal the appearance of the decorative objects at Poynton, in Agnew's reading, is to reiterate their status as abstract commodities, yet this is not borne out in the experience of reading the novel. Rather, the elusiveness of the things to which the text calls our attention and simultaneously denies us sight leaves a tantalising emptiness in which the reader must invest their imaginative faculties. In requiring them to imaginatively conjure the spoils from scant description, James's text forces the reader to recognise the impossibility of knowing things objectively. The rejection of ekphrasis means that reading the novel feels quite *unlike* the experience of visiting an endless gallery of objects, displayed openly for our gaze to sweep over. It demands creative, imaginative labour of the reader and reminds us that objects can be productive of different kinds of knowledge depending on the material practices which are brought to bear upon them. The silent spoils of *The Spoils of Poynton* constitute a refusal to understand objects on vision's terms, and, through that sense's entrenched cultural association with capitalist display, to limit their status to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 15; see Agnew, p. 97.

commodities. Thus we might understand James's reticence with regard to description as a challenge to the aesthetics of consumption.⁴⁷ This is just one of the ways that the novella asks us to attend to meanings of objects beyond the marketplace.

If *The Spoils of Poynton* sets out the impossibility of knowing things objectively, then it in turn repeatedly emphasises particular modes of relations which humans have to things, especially the collector, Mrs Gereth. She and Fleda repeatedly deny the importance of ownership to their aesthetic sensibilities, the latter asserting that the former 'cared nothing for mere possession' and 'thought solely and incorruptibly of what was best for the objects themselves' (147). Fleda, despite her marginal economic position in comparison to Mrs Gereth, also thinks of the spoils

without a question of any personal right. That they might have been, that they might still be hers, that they were perhaps already another's, were ideas that had too little to say to her. They were nobody's at all – too proud, unlike base animals and humans, to be reducible to anything so narrow. (162-63)

The collection defies possession itself. James figures the objects as active and independent subjects which cannot be 'reduced' to one-dimensional belongings. This insistence on the irreducible polysemy of objects continues throughout the novel; Poynton's things, at once possessions, negotiating tools, aesthetic objects, and parts of an assemblage, are also 'charged with memories' (38). In fact, it is the collected objects' association with memory, above any other attribute, that the novella asks us to attend to. Mrs Gereth, like Benjamin unpacking his library, makes relics through her collecting. She declares that 'the best things here, as you know, are the things your father and I collected, things all that we

⁴⁷ See also Simone Francescato, *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption*, for an exploration of how James stages what Francescato calls an 'aesthetics of desire' which dramatizes the appreciation of art as 'an anti-consumerist activity' (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). MyiLibrary ebook, p. 6

worked for and waited for and suffered for...[t]here isn't one of them I don't know and love—yes, as one remembers and cherishes the happiest moments of one's life' (20). The memories of these moments, attached to the collected objects, create an auratic atmosphere in which '[e]verything [is] in the air—each history of each find, each circumstance of each capture' (38). To Mrs Gereth, then, the furnishings are a record of the exquisite pains and pleasures of acquisition, 'an outward and visible sign of what otherwise leaves no trace upon the empty air'.⁴⁸ History and memory are distilled within them; they carry the 'particular narratives of time and place' which Susan Pearce identifies as being central to the collected object's association with memory.⁴⁹ Collecting, the text suggests, makes objects mean; even the wretched possessions of the maiden aunt take their beauty from their having been 'gathered as slowly and as lovingly as the golden flowers of the other house' (36). The fruits of the Gereths' collecting activities, as Bill Brown argues, are 'not so much objects as...congealed actions, passionate acts of seeking, selecting, and situating.'⁵⁰ In *The Spoils of Poynton*, the collected relic finds a different expression to the earlier *Aspern Papers*. Whereas Aspern's editor longs to feel the transmitted touch of the dead, what Mrs Gereth feels when she touches her things is her objectified self.

Despite this, *The Spoils of Poynton* approaches the collector's perception of the indeterminacy of humans and things less wholly negatively than *The Portrait of a Lady*. Gilbert Osmond and Adela Gereth both conflate humans and objects; they consider their collections as part of their extended selves, and arrange people and their relations as if they were things, but the later work seems to register a shift in James's approach to this intimacy of objects and subjects. Mrs Gereth's 'warm closeness with the beautiful' (7) and

⁴⁸ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), p. 236.

⁴⁹ Pearce, p. 245.

⁵⁰ Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 146.

tactile interaction with her collection is essential to her creative skill and aesthetic sense. Her attentiveness to the sensuous materiality of her objects is at the root of her ambiguous morality; as readers we never entirely condemn her because her acute sympathy for things enlivens our own. We share in her horror at Waterbath and her sense of the importance of keeping Poynton together. Although she manipulates the objects in her collection, she also affectively engages with them, attends to their histories, and sensitively arranges them. Just as Susan Stewart's reading of collecting seems to ignore the multivocality of objects which is purportedly at the centre of her project, to understand Mrs Gereth as in the grip of an all-consuming commodity fetishism is to disregard the deeply sensuous, memory-based relationships that she cultivates with her things, and the creative labour involved in her project. Victoria Mills suggests that James 'undermine[s] binary distinctions' between 'good' and 'bad' collecting 'by conflating the ordered and systematic with personal meaning and desire' in his depiction of Poynton and its collections.⁵¹ Indeed, James's refusal to separate these modes of collecting indicates his heightened sensibility to the polysemy of objects, and the opportunities that collecting affords to explore these multiple meanings.

The forms and meanings of Poynton run entirely counter to the prevailing nineteenth-century mode of collecting – the useful museum. The novella's insistence on the centrality of Mrs Gereth to elucidating the meanings of the collection suggests that Poynton is 'an authored display', a 'subjective act of enunciation.'⁵² Like early, pre-Victorian collections, it relies on its compiler to reveal its fullest meanings – authority is vested, not 'in the objectivity of History itself', but in the collector.⁵³ Its objects do not illustrate an

⁵¹ Victoria Mills, 'A Long, Sunny Harvest of Taste and Curiosity': collecting, aesthetics and the female body in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*', *Women's History Review* 18:4 (2009), 669-86 (p. 675).

⁵² Stephen Bann, 'The Return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display', in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. by Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 117-32 (p. 123).

⁵³ Ibid.

apparently objective and linear progressive narrative, but instead conform to an intensely personal, memory-based mode of meaning. *The Spoils* repeatedly directs us to the ways in which Poynton's collections exceed museal forms of knowledge and display. Of Fleda's heightened aesthetic sensibilities we are told that '[t]he museums had done something for her, but nature had done more' (15), a statement which works not only to situate taste as a naturalised attribute but also simultaneously notes the inverse of that view - the limited educative capacity of museal spaces. Indeed Fleda's reaction, on first entering Poynton, is to '[drop] on a seat with a soft gasp and a roll of dilated eyes' (13), a non-verbal, corporeal response completely at odds with expected nineteenth-century museum behaviour. The arranged objects at Ricks have a quality 'that will never be in the inventory' (172), and James repeatedly emphasises that Fleda requires 'no catalogue' to 'count...over' Poynton's objects (162; 160). Although Poynton is referred to as a 'museum', it is Mrs Gereth that elucidates its objects, she is 'a custodian equal to a walking catalogue, a custodian versed beyond any one anywhere in the mysteries of ministration to rare pieces' (100). She is akin to a keeper of a cabinet of curiosities – necessary to bring the objects out, with a knowledge of the collection that cannot be replaced by words. The text figures this knowledge as the result of an intimate proximity to and relation with objects that can be unequalled even by a comprehensive catalogue. For the personal meanings of the objects Mrs Gereth has assembled are encoded materially and accessed corporeally: her objects are keepsakes, souvenirs, and relics. They do not ask to be deciphered but to be caressed: 'there wasn't an object of them all but should be handled with perfect love' (12). In *The Spoils of Poynton*, James further develops the tactile epistemologies that he played with in *The Aspern Papers*, and posits corporeality as a legitimate source of knowledge and means of aesthetic discrimination, as it is to touch that the novel continually directs us.

Mrs Gereth's skill as a collector is figured as the exercise of her hand – she is no mere 'fumbler' but is gifted with an enviable ability to select and arrange (8). This is made especially clear at Ricks, where Mrs Gereth deploys her skills on the possessions of the

maiden aunt, turning the little house into a home in which 'there isn't a woman in England for whom it wouldn't be a privilege to live' (171). Her creative powers render it unrecognisable to Fleda, who asks '[w]here on earth did you put your hand on such beautiful things?' (171). For the younger woman, the newly-created atmosphere of the house 'shows, even if mechanically and disdainfully exercised', Mrs Gereth's 'admirable...infallible hand' (172). That hand has produced 'a kind of fourth dimension...a presence, a perfume, a touch' (172) – it has the effect of conjuring another being, whose story is 'in the very touch of the air!' (173). This repeated use of the hand and its actions in figurative language is echoed by Fleda's bodily reaction to Ricks – she 'feel[s]' an 'unforced' 'rapture' as she 'move[s]' 'from one piece to another', taking them in with 'hands that lightly lingered' (171-72). These actions parallel her earlier visit to Ricks when 'the very fingers of her glove, resting on the seat of the sofa, had thrilled at the touch of an old velvet brocade, a wondrous texture she could recognise, would have recognised among a thousand, without dropping her eyes on it' (47). Similarly, on her first experience of the splendour of Poynton, she is left 'to finger fondly the brasses that Louis Quinze might have thumbed, to sit with Venetian velvets just held in a loving palm, to hang over cases of enamels and pass and repass before cabinets' (14). James thus employs touch as both a figurative device through which it becomes a part of the way that the novel articulates cognition, and as the mode of action most appropriate for the appreciation of the material memories which are instilled in collected objects. The text articulates a way of knowing things in which touch plays a central role and 'in which vision is largely subordinated'.⁵⁴ To read Fleda Vetch and Mrs Gereth in the context of frustrations with museum culture is to bring new import to the location of tactile experience at the heart of their aesthetic sensibilities, especially in opposition to Mona Brigstock, who passively observes the surroundings at Poynton 'like a bored tourist in fine scenery' (16). James sets out a mode

⁵⁴ Otten, p. 40.

of apprehending objects which is more vital, alive, and reciprocal than the museum visitor's glazed gaze.

Of the continued focus on the tactile sense in *The Spoils*, Thomas Otten writes that 'it is as if James wants to see how intimate his portrayal of what...Madame Merle calls the 'flow' between the self and the objects that lie outside it can become.'⁵⁵ As such, the sites and occasions in which bodies and objects merge, swap, assimilate, or otherwise come into contact, are rich seams in James's fiction through which we might reconceive of the role that material has to play in our experience of the world. Otten's reading of the novella in the context of Victorian tastemaking is persuasive. But his rethinking of James's interest in the indeterminacy between bodies and things also provides a useful prism through which to examine the status of the 'too close' collector in James's fiction. Mrs Gereth's objects do not just relent to her touch, but return it: '[b]lindfold, in the dark, with the brush of a finger, I could tell one from another. They're living things to me; they know me, they return the touch of my hand' (20). James posits touch here as both discriminating and reciprocal; Mrs Gereth touches her things, and they touch her back, because they are instilled with the memories of her life. If collecting can be said to make relics, then it follows that, as James describes here, it also animates matter: relics return the human touch. It is a material practice which can blur, instead of delineate, our understanding of what separates subjects from objects. This property of collecting is most often couched in Victorian culture as a failing: an inability, like Osmond's, to distinguish between people and things and to act according to those categories. But in *The Spoils* this indeterminacy, instead of signalling the collector's moral decline, constitutes a more ethically ambiguous

⁵⁵ Ibid. Otten's main focus in his attendance to the material world of *The Spoils* is on the ways in which James inscribes social structures within the tactile aesthetic sense. He reads the text's moments of contact between humans and objects as corporeal markers of the 'absolutely unsharable' 'bodily truth' of class (p. 41), bringing our focus to the discerning touches of Fleda and Mrs Gereth and reading them in conjunction with nineteenth-century interior advice. Otten argues that James exhibits a concern with 'understanding the material world in terms of immediacy and reciprocity, as opposed to the distancing effects of vision', so that 'consciousness always has a material grain, a physical character' (p. xxii).

exploration of the shared materiality of humans and things. Just as the things are unknowable without their collector, she is inseparable from them; '[t]he mind's eye could indeed see Mrs Gereth only in her thick, coloured air; it took all the light of her treasures to make her concrete and distinct' (100). Mrs Gereth's indistinction from her things, the result of the collector's corporeal and emotional intermingling with the object world, is a vital and stimulating energy for her, it both enables her position as 'a cultural producer'⁵⁶ and gives her physical strength: 'I didn't know what was in me...I lifted tons with my own arms' (51). Her form barely tangible in the absence of her things, Mrs Gereth's collecting is posited as a means of cultivating a materially encoded, coherent sense of her dynamic selfhood.

The Spoils of Poynton acts, not as a warning of the dangers of treating humans as things, but as an examination of the reverse: the humanisation of things. It might be read as a challenge to narratives of the dangerous collector, rather than a further example of the type, as James reframes the collector's blurring of the boundaries between human and thing as generative and vital. Through Mrs Gereth and her collections, the text plays with the boundaries of where we end and objects begin, anthropomorphising objects in the process. Jane Bennett has recently argued that a willingness to abandon our categories of 'inert' and 'active' and their relation to objects and humans respectively 'can inspire a greater sense of the event to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations'.⁵⁷ Since *The Spoils of Poynton*, at its heart, is about the difficulty of attaining an understanding of and between individuals, it must be acknowledged that the frequent indeterminacy between bodies and things that the novella stages both figuratively and in its action suggests that James is exploring how this

⁵⁶ Mills, p. 673.

⁵⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 13.

‘enmeshment’ might bear on our ability to know one another. This is the principle at the heart of relic culture – that shared materiality enables things to accrue human meanings.

Ultimately, however, James signals the limits of this melding of the animate and inanimate. As in *The Aspern Papers* and *The Golden Bowl*, the relics at Poynton are destroyed. In this final action, the indeterminacy of things and people is played out at a superlative level; Fleda, arriving at Poynton by train, is ‘half-choked’ by ‘a great wave of smoke’ (183) from the house, inhaling and being sickened by the very things that she has come to visit. Thus, the novella ends by eviscerating the matter that has shaped it; it ‘find[s] closure by contesting the logic of [its] most central and material image.’⁵⁸ As such, Otten argues, the collection ‘remain[s] present as a sort of after-image that shapes our reading...even though the image itself has been crossed out’.⁵⁹ This is what makes James’s collecting fictions so ultimately obscure. Jamesian collectors tend to conform to late-Victorian stereotypes of the misanthropic collector, overly-invested in objects. Yet his texts refuse to entirely foreclose on the possibilities of collecting as a way of accessing properties of objects which are inaccessible in museum settings. Materiality is repeatedly centred and effaced in his work, so that it appears as an essential and fundamental element of our being in the world, a means to cognate, and a potential source of an affective, ‘esoteric’, connective knowledge, but it continually recedes from our grasp.

By always foregrounding the importance of what he describes as ‘[s]o much mute communication’ occurring all around us,⁶⁰ James’s works register both an astute sensitivity to the multiple valencies that objects can have, and an acute awareness of the limitations of museum modes of making meaning for elucidating this polysemy. Objects act, so frequently in James, not as mute vessels for their stories or mere symbols, but as

⁵⁸ Otten, p. xvi.

⁵⁹ Otten, p. xvi-xvii.

⁶⁰ James, *The Golden Bowl*, p. 139.

truly material presences that demand sensuous, frequently tactile, apprehension in order to access the knowledge they possess. His fictions both contribute to, and offer exegesis of, a late-nineteenth-century relic culture which was deeply committed to the ability of matter to carry and transmit corporeal meanings across time and space, often expressing a sympathy toward these claims and a deeply-felt understanding of the importance of an affective investment in, and tactile appreciation of, tangible matter. James understood collecting as a material practice with many different guises: no two of his collectors are entirely the same and his fictions work through the different ways that such practices can elicit different meanings and values from material things. Therefore, whilst James's fictions contribute to and draw on a Victorian cultural suspicion of the practice of private collecting, they take seriously the ability of collectors to make new meanings from things.

Part 2

‘Too Much’: The Collector’s Things

Introduction

The collection of Richard and Henry Cuming never stopped growing. Although no complete catalogue exists, we can be certain that the objects it encompassed numbered in their thousands, and that they threatened to overwhelm the Cumings’ South London home.¹ Figure 10 is a photograph of the interior of their house on Kennington Park Road, showing a home even more full with things than it was in the 1860s photographs; not only have multiple new objects arrived, to be placed in and around the existing collection, but also new furnishing for the storage and display of the collection is evident.² The mantelpiece has disappeared, possibly obscured by a set of drawers, and the attempts at symmetrical display which might be discerned in figure 1 are now floundering under the volume of things. One can only imagine what it must have been to move about a house furnished so profusely, to share one’s space with the collection quite so intimately.

¹ This is suggested by the inventory of the house and collection which was drawn up on the occasion of Henry’s death in 1902. Some larger objects are listed individually, such as a stuffed alligator and 4 human skulls. More typical, however, are the many entries which broadly suggest the extent of the collection, such as ‘a mahogany chest containing 40 drawers...containing shells, fossils, &c’ and ‘9 drawers containing curios’. Champion & Busby, ‘Inventory and Valuation’, 1902, London, Cuming Museum. The sheer number of objects, and the rate at which father and son acquired them, was probably one of the reasons that a catalogue was never finished in their lifetime.

² The photograph in figure 10 must have been taken at a different period from the portraits of Richard and Henry shown in figures 1 and 2; the wallpaper and the arrangement of several of the objects suggest that the view is the same as is behind Richard Cuming in figure 1, although taken from a slightly different perspective.



Figure 10. Photograph of interior of 63 Kennington Park Road [n.d.]. Cuming Museum, no inventory number.

There was a room in the Cumings' home designated 'The Museum', which may be the room pictured above although we cannot be certain. The family had many cabinets in which parts of the collection were stored, but as the photograph above suggests, it could not be contained by any of the furniture designed to house it. It overflowed the limits of 'The Museum', spilling out of that space into every available chamber of the house. Where did the Cuming collection end? It was, Henry's will suggests, everywhere:

I give and bequeath...to the aforesaid Parish of St Mary Newington my Museum illustrative of Natural history Archaeology and Ethnology with my Coins and Medals together with all other Curios contained in the apartments designated The Museum together with my Ceramic Collection deposited in the so called China Room...also...my Library of Printed Books and MSS. contained in the apartment called the Library and in the Closets in the Dining Room and Hall together with those in the Chiffonier in my Bedroom and likewise those in the Bookcase in the Dressing Room next to my

Bedroom and that also in the Breakfast Room together with the several Bookcases and Portable Closets...I further give...my Collection of Prints and Drawings with their several folios together with all the Paintings Drawings and Engravings with all the Plaster Casts and Carvings displayed in the Hall Staircase and several apartments of this dwelling...all the Curios which may be found in the upper north-east Chamber of this dwelling with the Electrifying Machine, Magic Lanterns and Slides and Philosophical Instruments kept in the said Chamber and also my several telescopes.³

This description paints an intimidating mental picture. For the Cumings, as for many other collectors, the line between collecting and furnishing one's home was never clear, especially when the home itself had to be so carefully curated. An inventory of the house and collection, drawn up in October 1902 after Henry's death, offers a more detailed view, although its clinical, decontextualised descriptions render some of the collections rather startling; the contents of the breakfast room are given as 'Paintings, plaster casts of animals. Bookcase, books, Doulton ware. Man trap.'⁴ There is clear evidence that Henry attempted to keep his collection in coherent groups, as in many cases, like is kept with like: a mahogany chest of twelve drawers contains eight of toys and four of old tools, and a nest of sixteen drawers all contain old glass. But amongst the attempts at logical display there are clues that the Cumings were becoming overwhelmed by the colossal volume of the collections: 62 drawers of named coins give way to 17 drawers of unnamed; general 'curios' spill from their drawers and cupboards and out onto open surfaces; three pedestal desks on the landing are piled with pamphlets and papers listed as 'almanacks, Kew Gardens, Portraits, Trade adverts, Antiquities, Archaeology, Biographies...Vegetable anatomy, Surrey, juvenalia, Cumings MS, personal ornament, hunting and fishing, house signs, advertisements, heraldry.'⁵ Such a proliferation of objects was entirely opposed to

³ Henry Cumings, will, MS [n.d.] London, Cumings Museum.

⁴ Champion & Busby, 'Inventory and Valuation', 1902, London, Cumings Museum.

⁵ Ibid.

the Victorian tenets of useful collecting. Useful collecting required that objects be displayed so that each might be apprehended both singly and as part of a larger set or sequence, its place in processes and systems easily discernible by the eye. Collections containing thousands of objects struggled to meet these criteria – overwhelmed by the sheer number of things, collectors might easily find that disorder, rather than instructive display, ruled their collections. Too many things were troublesome.

Plenitude of objects was one of the main complaints made in the popular press about Victorian museums. In journals and newspapers, mentions of museums frequently included reference to their institutional hoarding, complaining that overcrowding interfered with the museum's mission of providing collections that could be viewed for the public good. Ahead of the impending Select Committee on the British Museum, an open letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer from a group of Zoologists and Botanists including Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley was published in *The Athenaeum* in 1858, suggesting a scheme for the redisplay and complaining that visitors were 'dazzled and confused by the multiplicity of unexplained objects, densely crowded together on the shelves and cases.'⁶ In 1860 an article in *Chambers's Journal* complained that the same museum was 'cribbed, cabined and confined', 'too crowded to be examined with any profit; the prints are, to all practical intents and purposes, buried; mineralogical specimens hidden away in drawers, while the cellars are overflowing with antiquities'.⁷ The museum might, the anonymous writer fears, 'degenerate into a gigantic curiosity-shop.'⁸ Of course, some slippage between commercial and instructional spaces was inevitable – indeed it was intentional, as retailers and museums shared display

⁶ George Bentham and others, 'Public Natural-History Collections', *The Athenaeum*, 27 November 1858, pp. 684-85 (p. 685).

⁷ [Anon.], 'The Mausoleum Marbles', *Chambers's Journal*, 28 January 1860, pp. 49-52 (p. 49).

⁸ 'The Mausoleum Marbles', p. 52.

techniques.⁹ Stanley Jevons' paper on museum reform, published in 1883, notes with disappointment the similarities between the museum and the department store, and suggests that the latter is winning the competition for the public's attention; 'to the far greater part of the people a large brilliantly lighted Museum is little or nothing more than a promenade, a bright kind of lounge, not nearly so instructive as the shops of Regent Street or Holborn.'¹⁰ He locates the cause of this failure to instruct in the overcrowding of the museum with objects, writing that the 'general mental state produced by such vast displays is one of perplexity and vagueness.'¹¹ Jevons expressly advocates for a more selective approach to museum display, arguing that 'to children especially the glancing at a great multitude of diverse things is not only useless but actually pernicious, because it tends to destroy that habit of concentration of attention, which is the first condition of mental acquisition.'¹² In advocating for the more sparse display of museum objects in order to enhance their instructional value, Jevons repeatedly emphasises that a distance should be maintained between commercial and educational spaces: the museum, he writes, 'ought not to be a shop.'¹³

But it was the dingy curiosity shop, not the glittering department store, which was more frequently understood to be a threat to the sanctity of educative museum spaces. In 1850, the antiquarian Richard Westmacott (son of the sculptor of the same name who advised the government's select committee on the National Gallery) wrote that his intellectual

⁹ Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska suggest in *The Value of Things* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000), that retail culture mimicked museum display. See also Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 69; Rémy Saisselin, *Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 41 onwards. Julia Noordegraaf claims that museums took the practice of displaying objects in glass cases from shops such as jewellers which sold expensive items (*Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, & NAI Publishers, 2004), p. 47).

¹⁰ W. Stanley Jevons, 'The Use and Abuse of Museums', in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources*, ed. by Jonah Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 283-99 (p. 284).

¹¹ Jevons, p. 288.

¹² Jevons, p. 285.

¹³ Jevons, p. 295.

predecessors had been 'accumulating scraps of antiquity, without selection, order or application...dilettantism without definite object', making their collections 'a better class in short, of curiosity shops'.¹⁴ An 1857 *Chambers's Journal* article extolling the joys of window shopping celebrates shop windows as kinds of free exhibitions, asking, 'what museums of marvels are pawnbroker's shops?'¹⁵ George Augustus Sala, writing of the Louvre's Musée des Souverains in 1855, apologetically calls it 'a palatial Monmouth Street or Holywell Street for the display of secondhand sovereigns', comparing it to the famous antique-hunting areas of London.¹⁶ There are many more examples. The description of the Walworth Emporium of Nicknacks in the introduction to this thesis is illustrative of the potentially close aesthetic alliance between the curiosity shop and the museum. As previously noted, these shops were very different to the new retail spaces of department stores and as such were not associated particularly with spectacle and commerce. Rather, they were closer to domestic spaces, attics and cellars which housed long-forgotten objects. The danger of the museum's descent into shop was not that its objects would re-enter the commercial world, but that they would fall into neglect and no longer be useful.

Further criticisms of the British Museum make this clear, and compare the museum's spaces to a Victorian peculiarity which I will address in the sixth chapter of this thesis - the lumber room. An 1866 *Punch* article, 'Old Mrs. B. and Her Museum' mocks the state's collecting habits, as practised by the British Museum, which are compared to those of

...an old lady who goes to all the auctions, and buys bargains, and some of them very good bargains, indeed. But when they come home, she stuffs them into her cellar, and her store-room, and her back attic, and her lumber-closet, and under

¹⁴ R. W. Westmacott, 'Progress of Archaeology', *Archaeological Journal*, vii (1850), pp. 1-7, quoted in Virginia Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain: Victorian Responses to a Roman Past* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁵ [Anon.], 'Shop-Windows', *Chambers's Journal*, 11 April 1857, pp. 225-27 (p. 225).

¹⁶ [George Augustus Sala], 'Second-Hand Sovereigns', *Household Words*, 10:251 (13 January 1855), pp. 511-16 (p. 511).

the chest of drawers on the landing, and over the bookcase, and into the old orange hamper, and neither she nor anybody else knows what there is hidden away, or can by any means get at it.¹⁷

This caricature makes the problem with plenitude explicit - it means that objects cannot be accessed, and if they can't be accessed, they can't be useful. 'She has really got', *Punch* admits, 'among an awful pack of South Sea rubbish and dirty old birds, a wonderful lot of real curiosities, and it would be a public boon if they could be got out and seen.'¹⁸ But for this to happen, 'Mrs. B' must be brought 'into a more rational state of mind':¹⁹ the museum must be rationalised, a term now used to describe deaccessioning practices in contemporary museums, and one which captures the pedagogic imperative behind *Punch's* pleas. The objects must be rendered rational, logical - and visible. Instead, they are stuffed into the lumber closet, a place on a par with these other nooks and crannies of the house, as far from the museum hall, the shop window or the mantelpiece as can be imagined. In 1880, the *London Daily News* suggests that its readers will 'be interested to learn that the British Museum, so long in many of its departments a lumber room will shortly be converted into an exhibition.... it will not only possess treasures, but display them'.²⁰ Local museums were subject to the same criticisms. An 1855 article in *The Art Journal* sets out its complaints against the disorderliness which currently rules in municipal museums by positioning itself 'not of the class who regard museums merely in the light of innocent amusements, and still less...[of] another class who consider them as collections of curiosities, only to be tolerated as lumber rooms.'²¹ Rather, the author desires that education might 'enable the public in general properly to appreciate and use the collections freely thrown open to them,' explicitly positioning the museum as a

¹⁷ [Anon.], 'Old Mrs. B. and Her Museum', *Punch*, 3 February 1866, p. 45.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ [Anon.] ['All Londoners will be interested to learn...'], *London Daily News*, 16 July 1880, p. 5.

²¹ [Anon.] 'Local Museums', *Art Journal*, 206 (August 1855), p. 241.

pedagogical space in opposition to the lumber room's useless superfluity. Complaining that '[h]alf the interest of a thing frequently lies in its history, which, if not known, renders it of little or no value', the article highlights the links between improper display practices, the museum's educative utility, and the potential for learning which lies dormant in objects, calling museums 'silent teacher[s]' which are 'a large ingredient in the educational scheme, still unworked; lying like gold in its native bed, and wanting the refiner to make it more precious.'²² Display was an important part of that 'refining', central to the museum's ability to impart its message.

This newspaper and periodical writing is indicative of how print culture worked to police the acceptable boundaries of state collecting in the nineteenth century. Abundance, in these accounts, prevents the museum from usefully displaying its objects, and so it fails in its didactic aspirations. As these authors make clear, museums which fail to fulfil their educative purpose because of their proliferous objects are always in danger of slippage – into curiosity shop, and into lumber room. Each of these sites would have been suggestive of neglect for Victorian audiences, familiar spaces in which objects might be left, year on year, to decay and to accumulate dust. Abundant objects undermined the museum's attempts to make meaning of the material world because where there was too much, the possibility that neglect might flourish over education was a real threat. Not only might this obstruct the instruction of the populace, but it might undermine the very structures of value on which the museum was built. As Jevons' criticisms make clear, where objects proliferate, confusion reigns. What is valuable? What is worthy of the museum-goer's attention? Is everything worth saving? These questions haunt print culture's obsession with the museum which overflows its walls, and illustrate how collections could easily, through sheer size, become 'too much'.

²² Ibid.

Private collectors might, of course, have confronted some of the same questions in their own practice. But they were free to ascribe as much or as little importance to the answers as they chose; whilst many collectors did try to emulate modes of instructional museum display, plenty of others did not, and amassed collections which, like the Cumings', defied attempts at rational display.²³ In Victorian literature, the collector's overstuffed home becomes a familiar shorthand for their excessive materialism. Arthur Conan Doyle's short story 'Lot No. 249' is a spooky tale in which a 'reptilian' collector of Egyptian artefacts named Bellingham brings an ancient mummy to life to do his murderous bidding.²⁴ Bellingham's room in the Oxford college to which he belongs is 'a museum rather than a study', 'thickly covered with a thousand strange relics', every surface 'littered with papers, bottles, and...dried leaves', all 'heaped together' in confusion.²⁵ George Manville Fenn's short story 'The Bric-à-Brac Hunter' describes the collector Ehrenberg's home as 'a perfect store of what the French call *objets de vertu*, "picked up" by their owner on his travels, sent home to be stood up, hung, or enclosed in cases'.²⁶ Nicholas Daly has described these exotic interiors as signals 'of an expanding consumer culture that is also an imperial culture',²⁷ and Barbara Black similarly reads them as exercises in 'inviting the empire home', spaces which 'broke down firm distinctions between the domestic and political realms'.²⁸ Undoubtedly these crammed and eclectic homes have a place in discourses of empire and commodity culture, but they ought also to be considered in the context of Victorian ideas about excess, for it is not individual items which signal the fictional

²³ The most famous example is probably that of Henry Wellcome, whose gargantuan collections relating to medicine and the human body filled up not only his home and offices but also a string of warehouses, and provided employment for a worldwide network of agents who collected on his behalf to ensure that nothing was missed (see Frances Larson, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World* (Oxford: University Press, 2009)).

²⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Lot No. 249', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 85:508 (September 1892), 525-44 (p. 527).

²⁵ Conan Doyle, p. 530.

²⁶ George Manville Fenn, 'The Bric-à-Brac Hunter. A Strange Case of Art and Craft', *Strand Magazine*, 24:140 (1902), 144-53 (p. 144).

²⁷ Nicholas Daly, 'That Obscure Object of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy', *A Forum on Fiction*, 28:1 (1994), 24-51 (p. 34).

²⁸ Barbara J. Black, *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

collector's deviance but objects in great number. Fiction's homes and parlours in which masses of disparate objects mingle together act as markers that unbridled appetites for acquisition have surpassed the appropriate exercise of taste. They present their readers with collectors who have ceased to manage their objects and darkly suggest that perhaps the reverse is occurring.

As in the first section of this thesis, part two will look to the fringes of collecting culture to explore these issues. It will attempt to identify some of the various cultural histories which inflect anxiety around superabundance, and to place debates about the utility of, and superfluity within collections in their wider cultural context. As such, chapter four traces a cultural lineage between the miser and the collector, a lineage which Victorian writers were keen to establish and emphasise, to better understand how anxiety over the utility of collections took cues from earlier concerns about money and matter in circulation. It explores how fears about too-large collections, obscured by their own abundance, tapped into existing anxieties about excess and stasis embodied by the figure of the miser, which takes on a new potency in the nineteenth century. It seeks to understand how the miser bears on the categories of 'rational' and 'excessive' with specific regard to museum and collection settings, tracing the emergence of an intermediate figure, the hoarder, at the end of the nineteenth century. In doing so, chapter four sets out how Victorian cultural policing has deep implications for the way that we understand appropriate relationships between humans and the material world today.

Chapter five picks up the thread of the previous chapter's interest in 'fringe' collectors and collecting practices to examine the more diffuse collections of objects which found their home in the Victorian interior. I shift the focus from the exceptional excess embodied by the figures of the miser and hoarder to examine the Victorian home as a site of more commonplace superabundance. The chapter takes as its topic a proliferation of ornament which has been termed clutter, or bric-a-brac, and which has become synonymous with

the nineteenth-century interior, despite the efforts of late-Victorian design reformers who railed against superfluity in design and craftsmanship. It explores how interior advice books policed the boundaries of appropriate relationships with objects by setting out rules which governed the acquisition and display of objects in the home, and examines how 'collecting' and 'furnishing' were understood as separate material practices with different meanings, but with a shared antipathy toward excess.

But excess is an inevitable part of a capitalist system, and the Victorian interior had a particular and distinctive place appointed to take care of the waste generated by fashion and the associated increase in production – the lumber room, a place where outmoded and superfluous furniture, ornaments, clothes and other possessions might be deposited. The lumber room was a direct response to changing modes of consumption which required the continual renewal and updating of material goods, and provided a space to which Victorian householders might banish their morally embarrassing excess and waste. But in literature the lumber room's meanings eclipse its associations with capitalist systems of consumption. Tales of the lumber room, of which chapter six examines four, urge a reimagining of the nineteenth century's relationship with excess as they stage the space as the site of encounters with objects which do not conform to the ordering that they are subject to in sites of display and commerce.

The three chapters in this section are all linked by a common theme of excess, although each approach it from a different standpoint. If the focus seems to shift from collectors to other modes of accumulation, this is indicative of how powerful Victorian ideas about the 'useful' collection have come to be. The hoard, the house's clutter, and the lumber room; each falls outside of our definitions of what can constitute a 'collection', because in each, the proliferation of objects bespeaks a lack of intention in accumulation. My exploration of these three modes of collecting (or supra-collecting, perhaps), aims to draw out the relationship between the way in which the museum attributes *telos* to the world through

the spatial display of objects, and the powerful cultural injunctions that exist in the nineteenth century against overabundant collections. If museum collecting and display can be understood as a powerful means of making sense and meaning out of the chaos and disorder of the world of things, collections which seem to fall short in respect of their responsibilities to select and discriminate imperil those linear museum narratives. Greg Kennedy's idea of the feast offers a useful conceptual frame. Kennedy writes that the feast is a culturally-sanctioned and temporally limited event in which overconsumption can be celebrated, a participation in 'the undifferentiated flow of natural growth and decay'.²⁹ But abundance needs a check on it in order to remain meaningful, and 'with the erasure of the feast's temporal borders, the ritualised concentration of abundance dissipates into mere excess. Since excess is defined relative to a given purpose, it must be called unnatural insofar as nature lacks any sort of express *telos*.'³⁰ Imperfect though this comparison is, reading the feast as analogous to the collection is a helpful way of understanding why Victorian acquisitive excess was so often resisted and ridiculed. The feast is a ritual strategy for coping with the chaos, excess and wastage of the natural world – in this way we might understand it as contiguous with the museum. Museums were enterprises involved principally in bringing order and meaning to an increasingly unruly world; one which had existed longer, and more widely, and with more dead ends, red herrings, and since-disappeared evolutionary offshoots than most Victorians cared to admit. Indeed, Baudrillard suggests that our passions for things has a 'fundamental role in keeping the lives of the individual subject or of the collectivity on an even footing'.³¹ If the collector, in the model of the museum, is involved in making meaning, then the excessive accumulator's chaos is a threat to that attempt. The hoarder accumulates seemingly without boundaries, and therefore without meaning, without *telos*. They threaten the

²⁹ Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and its Problematic Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 11.

³⁰ Kennedy, p. 12.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner & Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24 (p. 7).

museum project's attempt to create meaning through selection and classification by conferring upon everything the importance of preservation. They open up the ordered world of the collection to the disorder of nature; they fling open the door of the lumber room. As the following chapters explore other inflections of excess in discourse about Victorian collecting, this link with the destabilising effects of nineteenth-century gradualism remains at the core of much of my analysis.

Chapter 4 – Extraordinary Hoarders: Misers and Collecting

Charles Darwin, a collector since childhood, recognised the precarious moral position of what was both his hobby and his scientific method when he spoke of ‘the passion for collecting, which leads a man to be a systematic naturalist, a virtuoso and a miser’.¹

Darwin’s professional success and enduring intellectual impact on almost every imaginable facet of culture suggest that his collecting remained a positive and productive pursuit, but his observation about the activity neatly encapsulates its many faces. The pursuit of collecting is useful, Darwin suggests, if put in the service of scientific skill or creative artistry. Pursued as an end in itself, however, collecting had unsettling affinities with miserliness, a far darker energy in Victorian culture. Darwin’s wry comment illustrates that the lines between greatness and insanity are fine, and might be materially determined.

Although cultural condemnation of misers is as old as the Bible, the figure of the miser took on new potency in the Victorian period as a symbol of stagnation and, this chapter argues, a mode of accumulation which undermined the useful collecting at the heart of nineteenth-century museum culture. Around the mid-century, misers entered the literary canon through the conversion narratives of Dickens’ *Scrooge*, from ‘A Christmas Carol’ (1843) and George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* (1861), fictions which spoke directly to a Victorian moral economy that saw shared wealth as preferable to hoarded gold. These tales of transformation exploit the familiar opposition between subjects and objects which haunts fictions of collecting in the nineteenth century, and their moral centres are located in the correction of their misers’ system of values – people above things, instead of the other way around. But just as fictions of collectors operate on axes more complex and numerous than

¹ Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* (London: Collins, 1958), reproduced at darwin-online.org.uk, cited in Arthur MacGregor, ‘Exhibiting Evolutionism: Darwinism and Pseudo-Darwinism in Museum Practice after 1859’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 21:1 (2009), 77-94 (p. 79).

varying degrees of antimaterialism, there are more layers of meaning in Victorian miser stories. Cultural commentary on the miser, in the form of novels, short stories and less consciously literary texts such as newspaper reportage, frequently dwells on the miser's troubling relationship with waste, and features figurations of stagnation, dormancy and hoarded potential. This chapter explores this relationship, and suggests that the power of the miser to inspire such great abhorrence might stem, at least in part, from their reversal of Victorian ideals around the transformation of waste into use, and hence, the making of meaning. Furthermore, this chapter considers how criticism of collecting beyond the boundaries of usefulness took some of its cues from this cultural inheritance, showing how the language used to talk about miserliness inflected the discourse of useful accumulation, and still today haunts our ideas about hoarding, a modern pathology of acquisition. Although the miser's misanthropy finds a clear corollary in collectors with a misplaced affection for objects over people, this chapter establishes the materiality of the collector's hoards as a crucial difference between the two figures, one which is suggestive of the importance of collected objects' sensuous properties.

Misers were a persistent presence in Victorian print culture. A search of nineteenth-century newspaper databases reveals hundreds of news items and reports from law courts that involve discoveries of misers, usually occurring upon the death of a person who is living alone and is known locally for their eccentricity. The sequence of events is repetitively familiar; on entering the invariably filthy home, money, bonds or jewels are found tucked away in nooks and crannies in the walls and furnishings, suggesting that the deceased has chosen to risk fatal poverty to ensure the preservation of their riches. These reports marvel at the perversity of the rich dying from starvation or cold, such as a case from France reported in the *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, in 1888, wherein the 'emaciated body' of a woman well known for her 'penurious habits' was found 'on a heap of rags and

rubbish' in her home, a 'veritable pigstye'.² Expressions of sadness at her premature death are overtaken by incredulity as her assets are discovered to be worth over £7,000, and her next-of-kin indulges in some '[r]ather unseemly rejoicings'.³ The same newspaper, in 1885, carried a short report on the posthumously discovered fortune of 'an old maiden lady named Mary Minnett', who 'lived in such a mean style that some of her neighbours thought she was really in indigent circumstances', but whose assets, after her death, totalled some £11,000.⁴ Similarly, in 1886, the *Bury and Norwich Post* carried a short report of a Leamington man who 'had lived and slept in a shoe-makers workshop', and who took early morning sojourns to gather 'pieces of coal and wood near the railway station', never spending 'more than half-a-crown a week on food', but who was discovered to have a fortune of £10,000 upon his death.⁵ There are many, many more; these tales proliferated as estate cases made their way through the courts, and are regurgitated in local papers all over the country. The repetition and circulation of the reports suggests that editors were well aware of the appeal of miser stories, that they had tapped into a wider concern or interest of their reading public's.

These contemporary cases, however, provided only scant details of their misers 'penurious habits', focussing mainly on the discoveries of cash or bonds which transitioned the subject from poverty-stricken to miserly, revelations which for readers, transformed not only the financial situation of the subject but their morality, also. Truly gruesome detail was to be found in compendiums of colourful and eccentric characters from history, such as Wilson's *Wonderful Characters* and Kirkby's *Wonderful and Eccentric Museum*, which featured detailed stories of miserly lives amongst the many

² [Anon.], 'An Old Miser's Hoard', *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 25 January 1888, p. 2

³ Ibid.

⁴ [Anon.], 'A Remarkable Miser's Hoard', *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 21 December 1885, p. 3.

⁵ [Anon.], 'A Miser's Hoard', *The Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*, 5 January 1886, p. 3.

unconventional histories they contained.⁶ Most notable of these for both its focus on misers and its comprehensive approach to the topic is Frederick Somner Merryweather's *Lives and Anecdotes of Misers*, published in 1850.⁷ This catalogue of misery displays a ghoulish pleasure in recounting the grime in which misers lived, giving detailed accounts of the state of their dress, the moulding scraps on which they dined, and the miserable conditions of their homes. It contains hundreds of anecdotes, some as brief as the newspaper accounts but many more lengthy and detailed, particularly when the misers under examination were well-known characters. Merryweather also speculates extensively on the causes of miserliness, taking up its apparent hereditary nature, relationship to consumer culture, and gender differences.

Merryweather's *Lives*, although now largely forgotten, proved to be a particularly potent rendering of miser narratives. It inspired a copycat book, Cyrus Redding's *Memoirs of Remarkable Misers*, published 13 years later, in 1863. Redding's book proceeds along remarkably similar lines to Merryweather's, both structurally and in terms of content - Redding uses many of the same anecdotes to illustrate the lives of his remarkable misers, and addresses several of the same questions that Merryweather also posed: is miserliness hereditary? Are people of all classes susceptible to miserliness? Can the rise of capitalist economy be blamed for the production of misers? Redding even addresses Merryweather's book, in order to discredit it, claiming that the latter's portrait of the miser John Overs 'seems very doubtful and almost legendary', and casting doubt on the sources for Merryweather's account of Audley, a miser from the time of Cromwell.⁸ His own tome, scathingly reviewed by *The Spectator* as 'the merest farrago of monotonous and

⁶ G. H. Wilson, *Wonderful Characters: Comprising Memoirs and Anecdotes of the Most Remarkable Persons, of Every Age and Nation* (London: J. Barr and Co., 1842), Internet Archive ebook; Kirkby's *Wonderful and Eccentric Museum*, 6 vols (London: R. S. Kirkby, 1820), Internet Archive ebook.

⁷ F. Somner Merryweather, *Lives and Anecdotes of Misers* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1850).

⁸ Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of Remarkable Misers*, 2 vols (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1863), vol. 1, p. 190.

uninteresting stories, selected without discrimination, related without effect, and heaped together without even the slightest attempt at methodical arrangement',⁹ is, if anything, even more guilty of the crimes he levels against Merryweather, containing not a single reference or mention of a source. But Redding's work, published in two volumes and containing nearly 800 pages in total, demonstrates that there was a continuing appetite for these tales; the Victorian public wanted to read about the details of miserly lives in all their sordid and vulgar detail. Rather ironically, Redding records halfway through the second volume of *Memoirs of Remarkable Misers* that 'the incidents in the lives of misers are few and being generally repetitious of each other, afford little new to record'.¹⁰ Still, he manages to find enough material that he thinks will interest his reader to carry on for another 200 pages, mingling anecdote with moral lesson, just as Merryweather had done before. Merryweather's book also inspired Arnold Bennett's meditation on the miser, Henry Earlfoward in 1923's *Riceyman Steps*.¹¹ Earlfoward's miserliness is mild in comparison to that which features in Merryweather's tales, but Bennett was apparently inspired by several of the anecdotes, including the story of a miserly dust contractor whose heaps were given as a dowry on the occasion of his daughter's marriage.¹²

If that tale sounds familiar, it is because the most substantial literary engagement with Merryweather's *Lives and Anecdotes of Misers*, and indeed, the one which is most pertinent to this thesis, is its use and extensive quotation by Charles Dickens in his novel *Our Mutual*

⁹ [Anon.] 'Current Literature', *The Spectator*, 23 May 1863, p. 23
<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-may-1863/23/memoirs-of-remarkable-misers-by-cyrus-redding-auth> [Accessed 7 April 2014].

¹⁰ Redding, vol. 1, p. 189.

¹¹ See Louis Tillier, *Studies in the Sources of Arnold Bennett's Novels* (Paris: Didier, 1969), pp. 144-46. Arnold Bennett, *Riceyman Steps and Elsie and the Child*, ed. by Edward Mendelson and Robert Squillace (London: Penguin, 1991).

¹² Bennett reversed the story in his tale, James G. Hepburn suggests, having Earlfoward's new wife clean out his dingy apartments as a wedding gift. Hepburn suggests other elements of Earlfoward's miserly history which might have been inspired by tales from Merryweather's volume; his death by the open safe, for example, is similar to the tale in Merryweather's book about the French miser who became trapped in his cellar, and died there (pp. 68-69). See James G. Hepburn, 'Some Curious Realism in *Riceyman Steps*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 8:2 (1962), 116-26.

Friend, published in monthly instalments between May 1864 and November 1865.¹³

Dickens scholars have wholly neglected to attend to Merryweather's book in their assiduous attribution of sources for Dickens's richest novel, despite (or perhaps because of) his thoughtful provision of both the title and author of the volume from which he draws so much.¹⁴ The similarities between the novel's narrative and Merryweather's tale of the dowry are particularly striking; initially received with disdain, the sale of the dust heaps eventually results in a fortune of two thousand pounds for the newlyweds.¹⁵ Dickens certainly possessed a copy of the book himself,¹⁶ and misers are threaded throughout his novel of life, death, and accumulation by the ghostly presence of John Harmon, whose dust heaps pervade the physical and psychic space of the novel, and by Noddy Boffin, the inheritor of those dust heaps, who feigns miserliness in order to teach his young ward Bella Wilfer a lesson about the love of money. Dickens quotes Merryweather when Boffin, having inherited the miser's fortune and suddenly finding himself rich, embarks on the pursuit of intellectual self-improvement in order to 'live up to' his new wealth, and he asks Silas Wegg to read to him. Mr Venus is also in attendance at Boffin's Bower, and the scheming pair are trying to weasel out of the golden dustman information about what is hidden in the dust heaps. It is a highly comic episode within the novel, and Dickens uses the Merryweather text in a number of ways which merit note.

¹³ Merryweather's book is a previously unrecorded link between Bennett and Dickens's novels.

¹⁴ No scholarly work attends to Merryweather's book. Sources identified for Dickens' representation of the dust yard include a play and articles concerning waste and recycling in both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* (see Brian Maidment's *Dusty Bob: A Cultural History of Dustmen, 1780-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). The abundance of such articles in the 1850s, which range from documentary-like reportage to imaginative narratives, suggests that the material waste of every day was a present and real concern, and an important part of the landscape of Victorian imaginary. A byproduct of the expansion of production, industrial waste in the form of dust was starting to invade the sanctity of the home; such accumulating waste demanded attention. See Kate Flint "'The Mote Within the Eye': Dust and Victorian Vision", in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, ed. by Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 46-62.

¹⁵ See Merryweather, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶ See *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill*, ed. by John Henry Stonehouse (London: Piccadilly Fountain Press, 1935).

‘This, sir,’ replied Silas, adjusting his spectacles, and referring to the title-page, ‘is Merryweather’s Lives and Anecdotes of Misers. Mr. Venus, would you make yourself useful and draw the candles a little nearer, sir?’ This to have a special opportunity of bestowing a stare upon his comrade.

‘Which of ‘em have you got in that lot?’ asked Mr. Boffin. ‘Can you find out pretty easy?’

‘Well, sir,’ replied Silas, turning to the table of contents and slowly fluttering the leaves of the book, ‘I should say they must be pretty well all here, sir; here’s a large assortment, sir; my eye catches John Overs, sir, John Little, sir, Dick Jarrel, John Elwes, the Reverend Mr. Jones of Blewbury, Vulture Hopkins, Daniel Dancer—’

‘Give us Dancer, Wegg,’ said Mr. Boffin.

With another stare at his comrade, Silas sought and found the place.

‘Page a hundred and nine, Mr. Boffin. Chapter eight. Contents of chapter, “His birth and estate. His garments and outward appearance. Miss Dancer and her feminine graces.

The Miser’s Mansion. The finding of a treasure. The Story of the Mutton Pies. A Miser’s Idea of Death. Bob, the Miser’s cur. Griffiths and his Master. How to turn a penny. A substitute for a Fire. The Advantages of keeping a Snuff-box. The Miser dies without a Shirt. The Treasures of a Dunghill—”

‘Eh? What’s that?’ demanded Mr. Boffin.

“‘The Treasures,” sir,’ repeated Silas, reading very distinctly, “‘of a Dunghill.”¹⁷

The contents page of Merryweather’s book, which Wegg reads out, is a veritable who’s who of historical misers, most of their deaths as infamous as the men themselves. John Overs, the much-hated miser of Southwark, feigned death so that his long-suffering staff might save him the expense of feeding them by fasting for a day, only to be bludgeoned to death by a terrified servant after he indignantly ‘awoke’ at the feast they held to celebrate

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 481.

his demise.¹⁸ John Little, the miser of Kentish Town, refused his doctor's orders to drink fortifying wine for so long that by the time he was persuaded to obtain some from his dank cellar, he was so enfeebled that its condition caused him to have a fatal fit.¹⁹ John Elwes, who had the dubious pleasure of being dubbed 'the greatest miser of his time' and was nearly omitted from Merryweather's volume by virtue of the magnitude of his fame, apparently inherited his miserliness from his parents and was often heard to cry out in his broken sleep, 'I will keep my money!'²⁰ Daniel Dancer, who famously ate a rotting sheep he discovered at the roadside, lived in such notorious penury that his name provided the eye-catching title for several early nineteenth-century pamphlets, which were continuously reissued over several years.²¹

The truth, or otherwise, of these tales is not very important. What matters is that the names of these misers and the legends about their habits which swirled around them were familiar to Victorian audiences. Their stories circulated in the print culture of the nineteenth century, as books, as chapbooks, and even as a newspaper series; *The Dundee Courier* ran a ten-part series of 'notorious misers' in 1878, featuring Dancer, Elwes, 'Penurious Paddy' and 'Peter Big Brogues'. Their names were used as a shorthand for miserly behaviour and to evoke associations with self enforced penury, filth, and particularly hidden and neglected riches; the *Evening Telegraph*, reporting on a rare case of philanthropic miserliness in 1880, says that the miser's bequest 'removes his name

¹⁸ Merryweather, pp. 55-56.

¹⁹ Merryweather, p. 72.

²⁰ Merryweather, p. 140

²¹ *The Strange and Unaccountable Life of the Penurious Daniel Dancer, Esq. A miserable miser, who died in a Sack, though worth upwards of £3000. per Ann. With singular anecdotes of the famous Jemmy Taylor, the Southwark Userer, a character well known upon the stock exchange: to which is added, a true account of Henry Welby, Who lived invisible Forty-Four Years in Grub Street; with a sketch of the life of the Rev. George Harvest; called the Absent Man; or, Parson and Player*, 2nd ed. (Ann Lemoine, White-Rose Court, Coleman-Street, 1797). Roy Bearden-White's thesis on the history of Ann Lemoine's chapbooks offers a brief account of the history of this volume; 'How the Wind Sits; Or, the History of Henry and Ann Lemoine, Chapbook Writers and Publishers of the Late Eighteenth Century' (unpublished MA thesis, Southern Illinois University, 2005).

from the category of ordinary misers like Blueberry Jones and Daniel Dancer'.²² Dancer and his sister even appeared alongside Anne Boleyn and Lord Nelson as waxworks in Ewing's exhibition, which toured Britain throughout the nineteenth century.²³ Dickens uses the circulation of Dancer and Elwes's stories to draw parallels between Krook and the misers in 1853's *Bleak House*; the spectacle of the Smallweeds' ransacking of Krook's rag and bottle shop leads onlookers from the court to purchase 'the sixpenny history (with highly-coloured folding frontispiece) of Mr Daniel Dancer and his sister, and also of Mr Elwes, of Suffolk'.²⁴ The crowds use these published histories to attempt to surmise what is happening inside the shop, the stories taking on the status of historical referent.

Merryweather admits that the material in his book is mostly recycled, some stories having been 'gathered from old country gossips' or 'gleaned from ephemeral sources, to which I cannot even myself distinctly refer'.²⁵ This suggests that at the time Merryweather is compiling his volume, these misers have already entered into myth, their invocation used to police the boundaries of acceptable investiture in accumulation. In any case, details of misers' lives are often so similar that, reading *Lives and Anecdotes*, one feels a sense of repetition even when the story is new. Merryweather brought together many stories which were already circulating from the late eighteenth century onwards and put them into a format which emphasised their abundance and similarity; the narrative patterns which are apparent in the newspaper reports of 'misers discovered' become even more striking in Merryweather's volume.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Wegg's recital continues with a sizeable section of Merryweather's book, specifically the portion pertaining to the searches of Daniel Dancer's house which occurred after his death, and which revealed the location of his riches. It is a long passage,

²² [Anon.], 'A Miser's Money', *The Evening Telegraph*, 21 October 1880, p. 2.

²³ See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 332. Reference to Dancer's waxwork can be found in newspaper notices such as 'A Waxwork Exhibition', *The Era*, 28 May 1887, p. 17.

²⁴ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p. 586.

²⁵ Merryweather, p. 4.

punctuated by the expectant shuffling and fidgeting of Wegg and Venus, anxious to discover, through the behavioural precedent of the historical miser, where they might also find their riches at the Harmon dust mounds and Golden Bower. This large portion of Merryweather's text, reproduced faithfully by Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend*, is, in turn, copied verbatim from an earlier, anonymously authored chapbook about the life of Daniel Dancer, *The Strange and Unaccountable Life of the Penurious Daniel Dancer, Esq. A miserable miser, who died in a Sack, though worth upwards of £3000. per Ann*, which was first published in 1797 and went through at least five editions, each subsequent edition supplementing Dancer's narrative with those of other famous penurious individuals. The origins of the Dancer story, then, are deep and obscure, and Dickens exploits this, the indeterminacy of the tale and its repeated circulation a mirror for '[t]hat mysterious paper currency which circulates in London' of which he asks '[w]hence can it come, whither can it go?'²⁶ Dickens establishes here his dependence on a literary and cultural inheritance of the lowbrow and the popular.²⁷ In using Merryweather's words, themselves taken from an earlier source, as the means by which Wegg and Venus might enact their own version of the tale of the uncovering of a miser and his hoard, Dickens positions these stories as a potent and enduring source of cultural assumptions and beliefs about miserly accumulation.

Wegg goes on to read, and Dickens to write, Merryweather's descriptions of the lives and hiding-places of an applewoman, a French gentleman, and a pair of Cambridge brothers, all of whom exemplified the characteristics of the 'human Magpie.'²⁸ The trope of the hidden treasure was a repeated structural element of miser stories, and Dickens draws on this established narrative in his own miser story, having Wegg seek out treasure in the

²⁶ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 144.

²⁷ Merryweather's words are delivered through the mouth of Silas Wegg, the ballad-seller, whose speech frequently recurses to the lyrics of the ballads of his trade, another form of circulating, origin-less print culture.

²⁸ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 483.

home and dust heaps which once belonged to Harmon. Each of these misers has secreted their riches about their home and, therefore, provide clues for the eager listeners on the location of the hiding place of Harmon's treasure. In Dancer's case, some 'notes amounting to six hundred pounds were found neatly doubled up in the inside of an old teapot', and, in the chimney, 'in nineteen different holes, all filled with soot, were found various sums of money, amounting together to more than two hundred pounds.'²⁹ Clearly, Boffin is familiar with the stories and in asking Wegg to read them is well aware of the excitatory effects that they will exert on him. In fact, Boffin has already asked '[d]id he show you boxes, little cabinets, pocket-books, parcels, anything locked or sealed, anything tied up?...if he had ever showed you a teapot, I should be glad to know of it'.³⁰ Tucked away in the centre of the novel, the excavation of the miser stories echoes the digging in the dust which Wegg and Venus must carry out.

Structurally, then, Dickens is riffing on the iterative nature of the miser stories and their dubious origins. Simultaneously, he uses Merryweather's book and its well-known miser tales as a model for Boffin, drawing on established narratives of the miser and their habits that readers would have been familiar with to make Boffin's descent from jolly Golden Dustman to grasping misanthrope more believable, inscribing it with a historical authenticity. Indeed Joel Brattin has noted that as Dickens planned the portrayal of Boffin, he made a note in his manuscript reading 'Work in *The Misers* — to bring out his pretended love of money.'³¹ In fact, Noddy Boffin's performance of his miserliness depends to a large extent upon his consumption of the Merryweather text and other such publications, and this plays into the concern with literacy which is also a theme of the novel. The strolls that Boffin takes with Bella Wilfer become hunts, opportunities to collect stories of misers and hoarders. Dickens writes that

²⁹ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 482 (also in Merryweather, p. 127).

³⁰ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 480.

³¹ Joel J. Brattin, 'Constancy, Change, and the Dust Mounds of *Our Mutual Friend*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 19:1 (2002), 23-30 (p. 24).

Any book that seemed to promise a chance of miserly biography, Mr. Boffin purchased without a moment's delay and carried home...

... It was curious that Bella, never saw the books about the house, nor did she ever hear from Mr. Boffin one word of reference to their contents. He seemed to save up his Misers as they had saved up their money. As they had been greedy for it, and secret about it, and had hidden it, so he was greedy for them, and secret about them, and hid them.³²

Dickens attributes Boffin with a kind of bibliomania, which, as Victoria Mills has described in her work on nineteenth-century collecting, was frequently spoken about with the language of disease.³³ Sufferers were accused of caring more for the materiality of the book than its contents, which went unread and unshared; Leah Price has detailed how nineteenth-century criticisms of bibliomaniacs focussed on their fetishistic relationship to the book rather than its text.³⁴ In this way, bibliomaniacs and other collectors were accused of useless stockpiling of goods which might have found more use or appreciation elsewhere. Boffin's secret stash of miserly biography appears as one such useless stockpile to Bella; once the books are found and purchased, she never sees them being read or hears

³² Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 467.

³³ Victoria Mills, "'Books in my Hands – Books in my Heart – Books in my Brain': Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature', in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 130-52 (p. 132).

³⁴ Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). George Gissing's 1898 story 'Two Collectors' illustrates this commonplace view most tragically. An elderly man, a failed author, is employed in the book trade seeking out old editions in bookshops and sale-rooms. One day he receives a request from his employer to search out a book, 'Songs of Youth', by Alfred Wormald Robinson – the book he himself had written and which had sunk without making any impact on the literary world. It has been requested by a client. Not possessing any copies himself, he duly tracks one down and forwards it to the man who has made the request, Mr Freshwater. He later presents himself at Freshwater's door, eager to meet and talk with the man who was so keen to read his work, only to find that Freshwater has no interest in the contents of the books he buys, and can only tell him that he is 'at present getting together those published in the Victorian time by houses which have ceased to exist.' The tale ends with a crestfallen Wormald returning to work and to 'the examination of the latest volume of 'Book Prices Current.' Gissing, *Human Odds and Ends* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1898), pp. 191-96.

them spoken of. The lives of these historical misers come to constitute Boffin's hoard, and to replace the gold and riches they hoarded themselves. Misers become the object of his miserliness.

These famous misers were as much figures of the cultural imagination as they were real people, and this status as potent signifiers in Victorian culture merits further study. John Vernon, drawing on examples from Balzac, Thackeray, Eliot and Dickens, suggests that literary realism's frequent portrayal of the miser in the nineteenth century is related to the new prevalence and circulation of paper money in that period. Vernon argues that as currency merely came to represent wealth rather than embody it as gold had, paper money took on associations with the increasing acceptance of credit and debt in the economy of Victorian England, so that it 'came to symbolise this volatile, expansive force of capital.'³⁵ The miser, for Vernon, possesses a 'nostalgia for a past in which the representation of wealth and its material reality were one,' and hoards gold coins in order to retreat from 'this expanding economy and all it represented – change, increase, the unknown, the future.'³⁶ In fact, writing in 1863, Cyrus Redding also notes that gold coins, not notes, form the object of the miser's attentions, and suggests that misers hark back to older, more solid, structures of capital and finance through their accumulative behaviours.³⁷ Tamara Wagner's consideration of a miser in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1862-3) concludes that his real crime is that he 'obstructs exchange' – what is hoarded (banknotes, in this case, suggesting a counterpoint to the link that Vernon and Redding establish between paper money and the spendthrift) cannot be of use to others.³⁸ Thus repeatedly, the miser is established as a figure who resists change and revels in stasis, which he comes to represent in both moral and economic terms. Marx says of the

³⁵ John Vernon, *Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 30.

³⁶ Vernon, pp. 35, 37.

³⁷ Redding, vol. 1, p. 11.

³⁸ Tamara Wagner, 'The Miser's New Notes and the Victorian Sensation Novel: Plotting the Magic of Paper', *Victorian Review*, 31:2 (2005), 79-98 (p. 90).

miser that he obstructs the production of capital by interrupting the processes of exchange (buying and selling) by which it is formed.³⁹ Since the capitalist, Marx writes, is he who seeks 'ever more and more wealth in the abstract', it follows that the miser and capitalist share the same aim, yet pursue it through different methods – 'the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad.'⁴⁰

For nineteenth-century writers, then, one of the perversities of the miser is that their hoards contain a potential which they refuse to capitalise on; indeed, it could be argued that this is a defining feature of the miser proper, for although Merryweather and Redding's books do include some instances of philanthropic miserliness, the latter proclaims that 'he who saves his wealth for another's good is no miser.'⁴¹ Redding declares that 'one of the evils caused by the miser is the arrest of the natural course of capital, and the hindrance to its fructification', and Merryweather's stories continually warn against the dangers of taking things out of circulation; we hear of a Frenchman who, when asked for a loan by the government, denied his ability to supply it, took all of his gold and hid with it in the vault, only for the door to close behind him, condemning him to starve whilst gazing upon his now-useless gold.⁴² An early chapbook about Thomas Hack, 'the Greenwich miser', argues that his fortune of one thousand pounds 'will appear the more surprising when it is understood that he never made the least use of his money', not even to put it in the bank, where it might have accrued interest.⁴³ A review of *Memoirs of Remarkable Misers* which appeared in the *Leeds Times* suggests that the miser 'does not use his money in the way the world, does, but values his collection abstractedly... He does not save it for his personal enjoyment, for he never uses it; nor for the social influence it

³⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 94-96.

⁴⁰ Marx, p. 98.

⁴¹ Redding, vol. 1, p. 17.

⁴² Redding, vol. 2, p. 127; for the tale of the Frenchman see Merryweather, pp. 68-69.

⁴³ [Anon.], 'The Interesting Memoirs of Mr Thomas Hack, the Celebrated Greenwich Miser' (London: Elizabeth Delay, [1819(?)]), p. 5.

gives him, for he hides it'.⁴⁴ A short story concerning miserliness, 'Paralysed Gold', written by the Reverend Philip Bennett Power, and appearing in evangelical weekly *The Quiver* in 1891, also uses the language of arrested potential. Its title is a reference to the miser's hoards, and in its opening lines the reader is asked, 'did you ever hear of a paralysed thing? - of that which was held in the grip of a disease which was living death...that thing is gold - gold!'⁴⁵ The story contrasts the hoarding tendencies of the elderly, appropriately named, Redfern Grabstone with the prudent spending of his clerk, whose wages are put to good use, and upon the miser's death, the relatives who inherit his fortune 'let that gold get air, and exercise, and put forth its latent power'.⁴⁶ In each of these tales and commentaries, criticism of misers focuses on their refusal to capitalise on the 'latent power' of their gold. By rejecting gold's purpose as currency, they flout the social contract which denotes its usefulness, negating both its exchange-value and use-value which, for gold coins, are the same. By not spending his money, nor investing it, nor giving it away – in fact, by choosing to live in such a way that denies its entire existence – the miser evacuates his gold of meaning for the period that he possesses it. His denial of gold's exchange value constitutes a rejection of normative systems of value and the meanings attached to things.

Fittingly, then, Dickens chooses to set *Our Mutual Friend* against a backdrop of waste and stagnation. The dust heaps which Boffin inherits are a towering testament to the lifelong accumulations of Old John Harmon the miser, a 'mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust.'⁴⁷ The trade in waste provided a rich imaginative seam for Dickens, as the dust heaps demonstrate the fortunes that were to be made in waste in nineteenth-century London. Brian Maidment has convincingly shown that Dickens draws on a rich history of associations when writing about the dust heaps. Considering narrative

⁴⁴ [Anon.], 'Memoirs of Remarkable Misers', *Leeds Times*, 11 April 1863, p. 6.

⁴⁵ P.B. Power, 'Paralysed Gold', *The Quiver*, January 1891, pp. 65-71, and pp. 145-50 (p. 65).

⁴⁶ Power, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 13.

similarities in several potential sources of inspiration for the Harmon mounds, Maidment suggests that Dickens' use of the dust heap as a setting deliberately draws on existing imaginings of such sites as a place of rescue from ruin and obsolescence, a place in which death and waste supports life, literally and symbolically.⁴⁸ Indeed, contemporaneous accounts of the dust heap tended to focus on both the squalid conditions that the scavengers and searchers worked in, and the remarkable fact that every thing which ended up there had the potential to be resurrected in some other guise. The dust heap was a place where the discarded detritus of all life accumulated at random: ashes and cinders from fires heating homes; scraps of vegetable waste from meals prepared; broken pottery and kitchenware from accidents and spillages; rags from clothes no longer wearable; bones which are all that remains of Sunday dinner.⁴⁹ From such waste and crumbs sprung the huge heaps, which towered above the buildings in London's Kings Cross. Yet the dust heap was not the final resting place of this waste as a modern day landfill site might be; it was a place of life and resurrection, as the sorters and sifters supported by the mounds found a new use for every scrap, right down to the most microscopic dust, used for making bricks. In a short story that appeared in *Household Words* in 1850, R. H. Horne figures the dust heap as a vast ecosystem, describing how it supports a range of people in their 'several occupations', and how, 'like a great black mountain', it provides a habitat for 'thistles, groundsel, and rank grass', as well as sparrows, geese, and pigs which feed upon its bounty.⁵⁰ This environment, with its several ecological niches each occupied by

⁴⁸ See Maidment, pp. 185-214.

⁴⁹ The issue of whether or not Dickens' dust mounds would have contained human excrement has been intensely debated (see Harvey Peter Sucksmith 'The Dust-Heaps in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Essays in Criticism*, 23:2 (1973), 206-12.).

⁵⁰ R. H. Horne, 'Dust: Or, Ugliness Redeemed', *Household Words*, 1:16 (13 July 1850), pp. 379-84 (p. 380). In this strange short fiction, a little band of scavengers, employed in their work at the dust heap, find a man apparently drowned in the nearby canal. To revive him, they bury him in the heap's finer dust, for 'It is a fact well known to those who work in the vicinity of these great Dust-heaps, that when the ashes have been warmed by the sun, cats and kittens that have been taken out of the canal and buried a few inches beneath the surface, have usually revived; and the same has often occurred in the case of men'. Horne's story is frequently cited as a possible source for Dickens' novel, and it is not hard to see why; its concern with the poverty of those who live on the dust heap is mingled with a sympathetic portrayal of the salvation and beauty which the scavengers find there in the form of glinting shards of glass, strange effervescent balls of light, and even an angel which

individual specialists, invites a comparison with Darwinian ideas which has been explored by several critics. Howard Fulweiler suggests, in his fruitful and nuanced reading of the novel alongside *On the Origin of Species*, that *Our Mutual Friend* shares a world with Darwin's theory, one in which a web of individuals are inextricably related, yet are 'fiercely seeking their own advantage, under the shadow of death and with no sense of transcendent meaning'.⁵¹ 'That life supports itself from death', Fulweiler sees as the shared central insight of both texts,⁵² and indeed, several minor characters are involved in creative labour which uses the detritus they share their world with. These activities both materially sustain them and elevate them morally. They are part of a gradualist narrative of change through what Nancy Metz has called 'the multiple and continuous acts of putting the world together that the individual imagination performs'.⁵³ For Metz, Dickens responds to the world of chaos that popular science describes by depicting, in *Our Mutual Friend*, characters whose 'ability to tolerate change, uncertainty, and even chaos', brings them success.⁵⁴ As Efram Sicher puts it, these characters are adept at 'turning filth into a moral good', at existing contentedly in a world whose matter is in motion, and turning that motion to their advantage.⁵⁵

was seen to 'rise out of the dust'. These worthy recyclers, one of whom, 'little Jem Clinker, a poor deformed lad, whose back had been broken when a child', possessor of a 'misshapen frame' and a 'shriveled leg', is the echo of Jenny Wren, are rewarded for rescuing the drowning man when he buys them a cottage in the vicinity of the dust heap, so that they might live together. In another precursor to Dickens' novel, the drowning man's fortune is realised when the title deeds to his property fall into his lap having been discovered amongst the dust, and, as John Harmon goes on to marry Bella Wilfer, the Golden Dustman's ward, the newly restored Mr Waterhouse weds the daughter of the Dustman in Horne's tale, too.

⁵¹ Howard W. Fulweiler, "'A Dismal Swamp': Darwin, Design, and Evolution in *Our Mutual Friend*", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49:1 (1994), 50-74 (p. 51).

⁵² Fulweiler, p. 56.

⁵³ Nancy Aycock Metz, 'The Artistic Reclamation of Waste in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 34:1 (1979), 59-72 (pp. 60-61).

⁵⁴ Metz, p. 61.

⁵⁵ Efram Sicher, 'A Waste of Money? Recycling and the Economy of *Our Mutual Friend*', *New Comparison*, 35-36 (2003), 131-44 (p. 144).

There is Jenny Wren, the dolls dressmaker, who sews clothes from scraps, and who, even with these scant beginnings, makes 'pincushions and penwipers to use up my waste'.⁵⁶ Similarly, Sloppy is a skilled craftsman who can 'knock a broken piece of furniture together, in a surprising manner', make toys 'out of nothing' and once 'fitted the broken pieces of a foreign monkey's musical instrument' together with crowd-attracting 'neatness'.⁵⁷ Mr Venus provides the most compelling and simultaneously ghastly example of salvation through salvage, as he reanimates the bones of humans and animals alike into skeletons which are used in the study of arts and science. From the medley of jumbled debris in a shop window in which 'nothing is resolvable into anything distinct'⁵⁸, Venus artfully constructs something intelligible. Indeed, he has just sent one articulated skeleton, 'a perfect Beauty', to a school of art, '[o]ne leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in it'.⁵⁹ He reanimates objects even after death, as the small bird with the wire in its chest that rests on his saucer poignantly testifies. Searching for hidden treasure in the Harmon mounds, Wegg plans to make use of Venus's 'patient habits and delicate manipulation...his skill in piecing little things together...his knowledge of various tissues and textures...the likelihood of small indications leading him on to the discovery of great concealments'.⁶⁰ Venus moves material from the categories of waste and death, and instils it with economic value, an ability which Wegg hopes to harness on the dust heap. Merryweather's *Lives and Anecdotes of Misers*, in a long series of passages about urban waste and dust, also suggests how things 'thrown away as useless, and...gathered up, have their value', so that 'what some men despise, the frugal and parsimonious will make the groundwork of a fortune.'⁶¹ That small things mean cumulatively is one of the principal lessons of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁶ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 223.

⁵⁷ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 385.

⁵⁸ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 303.

⁶¹ Merryweather, pp. 50, 48.

Many misers of the Victorian imagination also dwell amongst the detritus of the city. The famous John Elwes 'would pick up stray chips, bones, or other things, for his fire, and fill his pockets with them.'⁶² Thomas Hack, we are told, 'esteemed a piece of old iron or a few rusty nails, picked up in his daily perambulations, to be the surest way to increase his store'.⁶³ Merryweather writes of 'a miserable old man' with 'an ample fortune' who 'had been in the habit of rising at an early hour in the morning, and sallying out to search the streets for bits of bone or rags...no pin escaped his vigilant eye; no piece of paper was passed without being examined; no fragment of twine, no stray remnant of cloth or rag, was allowed to repose in the kennel'.⁶⁴ But these misers are distinct from Venus, Wren and Sloppy, and the workers on the dust heap, precisely because their acquisitive behaviours extend beyond the limits of utility. Rather than transforming waste, they store it up.

Although the dust heaps have often been read as a site of life and regeneration by critics drawing on contemporaneous accounts of the communities of workers who made their living from London's waste, few have noted that this is not the case in Dickens's novel.⁶⁵ To note this is not to suggest that Dickens does not draw on the existing associations of the dust heap with life and regeneration, but to suggest that he positions his dust heaps in opposition to them. The Harmon dust heaps sit idly, not a focus of sifting and sorting (aside from Wegg's assiduous prodding and poking) they provide a point of contrast for the transformative, productive, activities of Wren, Sloppy and Venus. They are a site of stagnation, a hoard. It is only when they are sold off that their fruits are brought to bear, and Noddy Boffin shakes off his temporary miserliness. Indeed, part of his salvation is the conversion of the dust heaps into a new home for Bella and John Harmon junior, the exercise of their social and economic potential; it's 'as if his money had turned bright

⁶² Redding, vol. 1, p. 67

⁶³ *The Interesting Memoirs of Mr Thomas Hack*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Merryweather, p. 155.

⁶⁵ By the time that Dickens is writing, Brian Maidment notes in *Dusty Bob*, the large municipal dust heaps which supported communities of sifters were no longer common, rather, private dustmen had become the norm (p. 35).

again, after a long, long rust in the dark, and was at last beginning to sparkle in the sunlight'.⁶⁶ The hoarded potential of the dust heaps finds its echo in the bower, too, which 'wasted more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use'.⁶⁷ In it, '[a] few old chairs with patch-work covers, under which the more precious stuff to be preserved had slowly lost its quality of colour without imparting pleasure to any eye, stood against the wall'.⁶⁸ This material, stored as capital, has lost its value even as an object of beauty. Accumulation negates the use-value of things; it is irrational. Like Marx, Dickens explicitly equates the miser with the raging capitalist, wondering of the speculator Fledgeby '[w]hy money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction'.⁶⁹ Fledgeby is comparable to the miserly Harmon – after all, they share an ambition for endless accumulation. But where the miser avoids markets, Fledgeby puts his money into circulation in order that it might come back enlarged.

William James, in what is widely considered to be the founding text of the discipline of psychology, 1890's *Principles of Psychology*, recognises both the miser's psychic investment in the potential exchange-value of gold, and that their heightened sense of this value causes them to fail to use it. He states that misers 'simply [exhibit] the psychological law that the potential has often a far greater influence over our mind than the actual', so that the desire not to foreclose the 'indefinite potentialities' which the hoard suggests is more powerful than any suffering endured under the present conditions of living.⁷⁰ James's writings on the miser are also significant because of the explicit link made therein between misers and collectors, and the intermediate category which he identifies: the hoarder.

⁶⁶ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 778.

⁶⁷ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 183.

⁶⁸ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, pp. 183-84.

⁶⁹ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, pp. 271- 72.

⁷⁰ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1977), p. 726.

In every lunatic asylum we find the collecting instinct developing itself in an equally absurd way. Certain patients will spend all their time picking pins from the floor and hoarding them. Others collect bits of thread, buttons, or rags, and prize them exceedingly. Now, 'the miser' *par excellence* of the popular imagination and of melodrama, the monster of squalor and misanthropy, is simply one of these mentally deranged persons. His intellect may in many matters be clear, but his instincts, especially that of ownership, are insane... As a matter of fact his hoarding usually is directed to money; but it also includes almost anything besides.⁷¹

James clearly establishes here that the hoarding of material objects in numbers which far exceed their utility is closely related to miserliness. Both are pathologies of keeping, and both, he suggests, are acquisitive practices that are uninterested in the inherent values of things themselves, be they gold or buttons. Whatever object the accumulator's efforts find focus in is incidental – the 'entirely blind impulse' to acquire might be directed toward any number of other objects.⁷² This 'proprietary instinct' is also manifest, says James, in the 'impulse to form collections of the same sort of thing,' for 'the chief interest of the objects, in the collector's eyes, is that they are a collection, and that they are his.'⁷³ James establishes here for the first time in psychological discourse an idea which is common to contemporaneous popular cultural commentary on collecting and which haunts collecting studies to this day, the idea of collecting as dominion-building, world-forming, and essentially uninterested in its objects. For James, the 'instinct' of ownership which is common to us all is perverted in the miser so that their desire to acquire exceeds the limits of normalcy, although he is silent on how those limits might be identified. It is taken as read that readers will be able to understand the difference between normative collecting and acquisition and the activities of the deviant hoarder.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² James, *Principles*, p. 727.

⁷³ James, *Principles*, p. 725.

What James describes in the above passage is familiar to a contemporary audience. The acquisition and possession of numerous trivial material objects, many of which might more readily be identified as waste or rubbish, is recognisable to us as hoarding, whether we view it as mere eccentricity or, as contemporary psychiatric discourse does, as requiring medical intervention. In 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the diagnostic text used by psychiatric clinicians and researchers, released its fifth edition, which listed hoarding disorder as a diagnosable mental pathology for the first time.⁷⁴ Hoarding disorder as defined by the DSM-5 is characterised by a desire to save possessions to such a degree that it results in mental distress or impairment, this usually being associated with the discomfort caused by one's home being compromised by the sheer number of possessions contained within it.⁷⁵ The features of hoarding disorder, although not formally enshrined in medical literature until 2013, find their first expression in the nineteenth century and its policing of the boundaries of acceptable acquisitive behaviour. Although the term 'hoarding' was rarely used in the Victorian period in the same way that we would understand it today, through James's *Principles* we begin to see traces of the emergence of a medical analysis of accumulative habits at the end of the century, the features of this most aberrant practice having become legible as the idea of the 'useful' collection gained traction for a museum-going public. In the late nineteenth century, the language for talking about hoarding does not yet exist – the terminology emerges later, in the twentieth century's medical discourse. But in this historical moment, we can read the emergence of the hoarder in the space between the miser and the collector, two figures who were closely related in the Victorian cultural imagination because of their accumulative practices. The *Leeds Times* review of *Memoirs of Remarkable Misers* makes this explicit, noting that misers bear a strong similarity to 'those collectors

⁷⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th edn (Arlington, VA.: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pp. 247-51.

⁷⁵ See diagnostic criteria, *DSM-5*, p. 247.

who rave after old china, old books, old manuscripts, and old coins'.⁷⁶ The objects of their 'ravings' might be different, but the collector's irrational pursuits here find their counterpart in the miser, and the associations of this connection lurk at the centre of much Victorian commentary on errant collectors.

Susan Pearce suggests that 'the usual distinction drawn between 'collector' and 'miser/accumulator/hoarder' is that the collector has a 'rational' purpose in mind which the other does not.'⁷⁷ Gesturing toward the culturally-determined nature of the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate accumulative practices, she contends that '[t]he difficulty with this is that the psychological drives between the two are by no means as clear-cut as the use of different words would suggest.'⁷⁸ Culture determines what is normal and what is excessive, which forms of accumulation are 'rational' and which are not. Recent work in the humanities and social sciences has begun to address this; Scott Herring's 2014 book, *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* seeks to counter 'hoarding's formula as an individualized mental disorder' by concentrating 'less on the mind of the accumulator and more on those who have characterized hoarding as an aberration in the first place.'⁷⁹ Political theorist Jane Bennett suggests that we might see hoarding as the 'madness appropriate to us; to a political economy devoted to overconsumption, planned obsolescence, relentless extraction of natural resources, and vast mountains of disavowed waste'.⁸⁰ Both Bennett and Herring pinpoint hoarding's emergence in culture as part of recent history, a twentieth-century phenomenon, located particularly in the United States. But this thesis establishes that hoarding first finds its expression in the Victorian era, when our industrial capitalist economy took hold: a period

⁷⁶ [Anon.], 'Memoirs of Remarkable Misers', *Leeds Times*, 11 April 1863, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 21.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Scott Herring, *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Jane Bennett, *Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter*, online video recording of a lecture delivered at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, New York, 13 September 2011. Vimeo <<https://vimeo.com/29535247>> [accessed 23 May 2014].

in which our understanding of what proper and appropriate relationships with things and collections should be takes form. Histories of hoarding commonly begin with the mid-twentieth century, when the story of New York City's Collyer brothers, found dead amongst their hoard in an affluent neighbourhood, made headlines around the world and brought hoarding into the public consciousness.⁸¹ But such histories exclude the rich legacy of Victorian ideas about appropriate modes of accumulation. The nineteenth century saw the terms laid out for our understanding of hoarding today, in its explorations of the dynamics of collecting and material abundance.

Like collecting, the acquisition of money was understood to be both necessary and useful, but in order to be deemed as such, it had to be practised in ways which were sanctioned by the prevailing culture – it had to be put to use. Merryweather explicitly states that 'the propensity to acquire has its legitimate sphere of usefulness, capable of adding to the blessings and the purposes of life. To its healthy exercise we are indebted for many of those perilous enterprises which have resulted in the discovery of unknown regions, to those vast schemes of art, which have enabled us to span the world with iron roads, and to plough the deep with untiring swiftness.'⁸² The acquisition which Merryweather condones is that which is in the service of progress; scientific, technological, industrial, artistic. Whatever is acquired, be it money or material goods, should serve some use. But the private collector was in danger of sharing with the secretive miser the tendency to doubly deny the use-value of their objects. Not only, as Baudrillard states, does the collector divest his things of their use-value through his possession of them, but in the nineteenth century private collectors also risked the usefulness of the collection as a whole by

⁸¹ The story of the Collyer brothers is examined in Herring's *The Hoarders*, and Randy Frost and Gail Steketee's *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).

⁸² Merryweather, p. 177.

keeping it from being publicly displayed.⁸³ As part one of this thesis established, instructive display was considered paramount for rendering collections useful and instructive. Accusations of waste haunted Victorian collectors, just as they did the museums which inefficiently displayed and used the objects in their possession. Already, private collections threatened the tenets of useful collecting merely by virtue of their privacy – what is not on display to the general public cannot educate or improve the populace. An article celebrating the century's collectors which appeared in *Leisure Hour* in 1884 squarely frames its praise in terms of the public utility of collections, beginning and ending by suggesting that the reader ought to 'feel thankful for the liberality on the part of their possessors which has made so many treasures of art and intellectual interest accessible to all orders of the community.'⁸⁴ Collectors whose possessions numbered into the tens of thousands, such as the bibliophile Sir Thomas Phillips, could be subject to accusations that their collecting was responsible for 'diverting important national material from public ownership'.⁸⁵ Indeed, Virginia Hoselitz has described how, within nineteenth-century antiquarian circles, collections understood to be of the most utility were those that had been catalogued, and thus made available to other researchers, at least textually if not materially.⁸⁶ Private collections could be sold and dispersed, too, and consequently 'lost to science'.⁸⁷ As such, they teetered eternally at the periphery of usefulness, and often, if they were particularly profuse, were readily condemned as mere hoards.

⁸³ See Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-24, in which he states that 'possession cannot apply to an implement, since the object I utilize always directs me back to the world. Rather it applies to that object once it is *divested of its function and made relative to a subject*' (p. 7). See also the introduction to this thesis, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁴ [Anon.], 'Collections of Curiosities', *The Leisure Hour*, May 1884, 278-82.

⁸⁵ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 15.

⁸⁶ Virginia Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain: Victorian Responses to a Roman Past* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 155-56.

⁸⁷ Of course, some collections were sold to museums (such as those of the antiquarian and archaeologist Charles Roach-Smith, whose collections were sold to the British Museum). But attempted sales might not always complete, as in the case of the Cumings, as the interests of state museums were often not aligned with the passions of private collectors, meaning that proposed sales did not always take place.

William James's descriptions of hoarding behaviour presuppose the inherent uselessness of the objects collected. James relates the details of two particular cases of which he has recently heard, the first being 'a miser who principally hoarded newspapers' which so filled 'all the rooms of his good-sized house from floor to ceiling that his living-space was restricted to a few narrow channels between them'.⁸⁸ This account of a nineteenth-century hoarder could just as easily pass as a contemporary description, so familiar are we now with tales of homes turned warren-like by rubbish, particularly stacks of newspapers and magazines; in fact, this characteristic of the behaviour has come to be enshrined in diagnostic literature.⁸⁹ The second story, which James claims appears in that morning's newspaper, is an account given by the Boston City Board of Health, who, having been occasioned to empty a miser's home, gave the following report;

He gathered old newspapers, wrapping-paper, incapacitated umbrellas, canes, pieces of common wire, cast-off clothing, empty barrels, pieces of iron, old bones, battered tin-ware, fractured pots, and bushels of such miscellany as is to be found only at the city 'dump.' The empty barrels were filled, shelves were filled, every hole and corner

⁸⁸ James, *Principles*, p. 726.

⁸⁹ The DSM-5 states that 'The most commonly saved items are newspapers, magazines, old clothing, bags, books, mail, and paperwork, but virtually any item can be saved. The nature of items is not limited to possessions that most other people would define as useless or of limited value. Many individuals collect and save large numbers of valuable things as well, which are often found in piles mixed with other less valuable items' (p. 248). Although the diagnostic criteria insist that hoarding can be identified where items are kept, 'regardless of their actual value', clearly the issue of perceived value is central to diagnosis, for even when valuable items are hoarded, their juxtaposition with valueless items is an indicator of a pathology of keeping. In a study designed to examine the suitability of the DSM-5 criteria for distinguishing between hoarders and collectors, Ashley Nordsletten and David Mataix-Cols address this issue. They note that our perception of the value of collected items is likely to influence our evaluation of the collector's aversion to getting rid of them - if the items have more monetary value, we would perceive the collector's unwillingness to part with them to be quite reasonable. They further identify that there are some cases of hoarding recorded in which the sufferer hoarded valuable, expensive items, but that these are in the minority (see Ashley E. Nordsletten and David Mataix-Cols, 'Hoarding Versus Collecting: Where does Pathology Diverge from Play?', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32 (2012), 165-76 (p. 170)). However, since hoarding, and indeed collecting more widely, so frequently involves the preservation of low-value items, it has come to be associated in the cultural imaginary with that mode. In a study by Pearce, most collectors (71.6%) were *not* focussed on the preservation of high-value items, but gathered 'rubbish' items (Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: Sage, 1998), cited in Nordsletten & Mataix-Cols, p. 170). This further suggests the arbitrary nature of the distinctions drawn between hoarding and collecting.

was filled, and in order to make more storage-room, 'the hermit' covered his store-room with a network of ropes, and hung the ropes as full as they could hold of his curious collections. There was nothing one could think of that wasn't in that room.⁹⁰

Common to both of these reports is both the proliferation of objects and their negligible value; the hoarders keep ephemeral items such as newspapers and wrapping paper, broken items destined for the waste-bin, and other miscellaneous objects too trivial to warrant preservation. Hoarders collect rubbish; today the mere word conjures images of people surrounded by empty packaging, magazines, junk mail, miscellaneous plastic flotsam, broken objects, and parts which have become separated from their wholes, not works of fine or decorative art. Partly this is because the neatly ordered and displayed collection has become such a persistent signifier of the value of objects – display demands our attention, it indicates that these are things from which we might learn something. When things proliferate in large, disorderly numbers, they cognate as rubbish - the British Museum basement, derided in Victorian newspapers, a case in point. One of Merryweather's famous misers provides a further example. John Little, the 'miser of Kentish Town', who died in 1798,

was not only a miser but a lumberer of useless trash. He gratified his mania to acquire, without regarding the utility or intrinsic value of the things which he amassed; and we can discover no motive in his accumulations but the mere gratification of the promptings of acquisitiveness. After his death, one hundred and seventy-three pairs of breeches, besides a numerous collection of other antiquated and useless articles of wearing apparel were found in a room which had been kept locked for many years.

⁹⁰ James, *Principles*, p. 727.

One hundred and eighty musty old wigs, of all shapes and sizes, yellow, black, and grey, were found stowed away in the coach-house.⁹¹

Here Merryweather clearly characterises Little's hoarding behaviour as a continuation of his miserly activities, stating that there is 'no motive in his accumulations but...mere gratification'. His mania, we learn, paid no notice to 'the utility or intrinsic value' of the things he collected, and yet the accumulations described are focussed on a particular category of useful objects – clothing. The sheer numbers in which Little collects them, however, and the way that he stashes them in disarray, mean that they slip into the category of 'useless trash': they become hoard.

The hoarder threatens the ontological basis of collecting because he refuses to participate in the systems by which collections make things mean. Their seemingly indiscriminatory approach to accumulation is at odds with the tenets of useful collecting as set out by museum culture as their objects are not exemplary, set apart and made to speak through display. This is one of the ways that our contemporary understanding of the limits of collecting takes root in the nineteenth century – according to Victorian ideals, proper collecting is instructive and useful, and so its objects should be properly selected, classified and displayed. But in the hoard the potential for learning disappears as the collection becomes jumble, such that messiness and poor display is now one of the means by which Hoarding Disorder can be diagnosed.⁹² Furthermore, the objects of the hoarder's accumulations are not the usual subjects of useful collecting. As the example above demonstrates, hoarding is not exclusively attached to junk objects, but it is true that in a large majority of cases, the objects hoarded are designed to be ephemeral. This is as true of the nineteenth-century hoarders described by James and Merryweather as it is of

⁹¹ Merryweather, p. 71.

⁹² The DSM-5 states that 'Hoarding disorder contrasts with normative collecting behavior, which is organised and systematic, even if in some cases the actual amount of possessions may be similar to the amount accumulated by an individual with hoarding disorder' (p. 248)

the twenty-first-century hoarders who appear in popular television entertainment and psychiatric discourse. For James, this is a symptom of their wayward acquisitory instincts – no longer able to identify the proper objects for acquisition, hoarders' madness manifests as a tendency to keep almost anything that presents itself to them. Collecting is one of the means by which societies not only preserve and present precious items, but also make them valuable. To collect an object is to instil it with special meanings. As Pearce writes:

...the notion of the special object set we call a collection is bound up with ideas...about the deliberate intention to create a group of material perceived by its possessor to be lifted out of the common purposes of daily life and to be appropriate to carry a significant investment of thought and feeling, and so also of time, trouble and resource.⁹³

The hoarder's collecting invests thought, feeling, time and trouble in objects which, according to the social contract created by museum culture, do not demand these resources. They disrupt the categories of rubbish and treasure, distinctions at the very heart of our shared culture.

Our ideas about waste are not absolutes; we have seen already how the rubbish sites of Pompeii and London provided fruitful ground for the intellectual inquiry of Victorian archaeologists. What is considered appropriate material for collection and study at one time and place may appear the markings of lunacy in another; the man who saves rubbish can provide us with a rich historical archive some years later. Henry Cuming's collections include vast quantities of playbills, posters, and advertisements, but he never published any article relating to their typography, language, distribution or development. Clearly, he

⁹³ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 23.

judged these things worth saving but they did not constitute an appropriate subject for antiquarian research in the nineteenth century; today, however, they provide a valuable potential source of information about Victorian theatre and print culture. Collections of printed ephemera in fact provide a good example of the contingent meanings of rubbish. John Johnson started collecting paper ephemera in the 1920s, and his collection is now held by the Bodleian Library. He said of the collectors he viewed as his predecessors in the field that they 'saw the truth that the waste, the ephemera, of to-day are the evidential data of tomorrow'.⁹⁴ Johnson's collection included trade cards, newspapers, stamps, pamphlets, exercise books, advertisements, labels, catalogues, and most other printed ephemera imaginable. He described his collection as containing 'everything which would ordinarily go into the waste paper basket after use', and indeed the Bodleian Library's early attitude toward his ephemera collection reflected this; they acquired it in 1968, having, during a crisis of space during the 1930s, marked out 'valueless' printed ephemera for 'liquidation'.⁹⁵ One of the collectors whom Johnson looked up to was Robert Proctor (1868-1903), a bibliographer. Proctor, like many ephemera collectors, relied on a network of friends to furnish him with the materials for his collection, and Johnson's description of the contributions of one such acquaintance offer a comic insight into how Proctor's contemporaries viewed his accumulative habits: 'he used to keep an old commode in his room with its lifting lid, which was known as 'Proctor's rubbish box'. Day by day all the common discarded papers of life were dropped into the pan of the commode and later went on to Proctor.'⁹⁶ This filing system, as well as illustrating the disdain with which now-valuable collections might be viewed by their contemporaries, is also suggestive of the close relation between ephemera and waste.

⁹⁴ 'The John Johnson Collection: Catalogue of an Exhibition' (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1971) <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/86044/catalogue-of-an-exhibition.pdf> [accessed 20 May 2013], p. 12.

⁹⁵ 'John Johnson Collection', pp. 8, 9.

⁹⁶ 'John Johnson Collection', p. 8.

Michael Thompson's 1979 work, *Rubbish Theory*, is pertinent here. Thompson examines the mechanisms, not by which value is created, but by which items move through different spheres of value. He sets out the categories of 'transient' and 'durable' to describe items which respectively either 'decrease in value over time and have finite life spans' or 'increase in value over time and have (ideally) infinite life-spans'.⁹⁷ We might put a plastic cup or a ballpoint pen in the transient category, and well-built housing and precious metals into the durable category, to choose some fairly crude examples. Thompson also describes a third category, rubbish, into which a transient object might 'slide' as it 'gradually declin[es] in value and in expected life-span'.⁹⁸ Notably, Thompson illustrates his theory of rubbish through the example of the Stevengraph. These cheap and collectible machine embroidered pictures were manufactured as 'transient' items in the 1880s but as inexpensive machine-wrought crafts, quickly fell from favour (into 'rubbish') until a revival in popularity and a diminished pool of available examples saw their prices soar in the 1960s and they passed into 'durable'.⁹⁹ That he chooses a nineteenth-century object to illustrate his argument is striking; in fact, none of Thompson's examples for rubbish theory are pre-1800. This is because the nineteenth century is when the possibility of the disposable first comes into view. Never before had there been such opportunity to revel in an abundance of material. Print culture and new manufacturing techniques made the ephemeral readily available and this new proliferation of transient, potentially rubbish items may also have contributed to the emergence of hoarding practices. But crucially for Thompson, no object is either transient or durable because of its own physical properties. These are categories which are 'imposed upon the world of objects', and therefore in

⁹⁷ Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Thompson, p. 9.

⁹⁹ See Thompson, pp. 14-24. Stevengraphs are now widely collected by both private collectors and museums.

certain conditions, acted upon by certain individuals, objects like the Stevengraph can move from rubbish, to transient, to durable.¹⁰⁰

Therefore the passage of time is not the only factor which elevates items, like the ephemera collected by Proctor and Johnson, from rubbish to durable. Sufficient individuals must make, to a degree, simultaneous positive evaluations of rubbish items, before the culture at large will recognise the change in category. Significantly, for Thompson, the ability to elevate objects from rubbish to durable is dependent upon the individual's possession of cultural capital. 'The power to make things durable', he suggests, 'is a function of the relative extents of this control over time and space...[which] is secured by gaining control over knowledge...not just physical objects but also ideas, historical facts, and systems of knowledge that are subject to social malleability'.¹⁰¹ In the case of the ephemera collectors mentioned above, both Johnson and Proctor were affiliated with prestigious libraries and archives; Johnson took on the position, in 1925, of Printer to the University at Oxford University Press, and Proctor worked in the printed books section of the British Museum for many years. These collectors were in positions of power over the very idea of knowledge; each of them, from a professional perspective, was able to stage some kind of transformation in knowledge creation and thus to perform elevating acts of evaluation which gave their subject matter new, culturally sanctioned values.

Thompson's theory helps to expose hoarding as a contingent category in which the ability of individuals to accrue cultural capital plays a large part. The misers and hoarders of the Victorian popular imagination were certainly not in possession of the necessary status and position to effect the transition of their collections from one sphere of value to another,

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, p. 52.

and this continues to be one of the hallmarks of contemporary hoarding disorder.¹⁰² Those who kept items usually designated as ‘rubbish’ were considered to be mentally deranged accumulators, not normally functioning collectors. Merryweather describes how the misers and hoarders in his book are in the grip of ‘the mania to acquire’, which has become ‘a mental disease’ and ‘outstep[ped] the control of the better feelings.’¹⁰³ William James echoed these ideas in the language of professional psychiatric discourse when he wrote in 1890 that the acquisitive impulse is common to all people, and observable from a young age, but ‘[i]n civilized life the impulse to own is usually checked by a variety of considerations, and only passes over into action under circumstances legitimated by habit and common consent’.¹⁰⁴ Collecting is one such socially legitimated form by which the impulse to acquire can be exercised, allowing the normative development of accumulative behaviour, whereas miserliness (and its relative hoarding) are demonstrative of a failure to exercise control over this instinct. As such, these activities are aligned with base animality: James writes that ‘[t]he hoarding instinct prevails widely among animals as well as among men.’¹⁰⁵ Indeed, in *Degeneration* Nordau identifies the unstoppable acquisition of ‘useless trifles’ as a mark of the degenerate; the inability ‘to pass by any lumber without feeling an impulse to acquire it’ casts a dark shadow, for Nordau, over the age’s obsession with collecting.¹⁰⁶ Thus the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a pathology of

¹⁰² The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria suggest that hoarding can apply to individuals who collect objects of any material value, but the perceived value of objects is likely to have an effect on diagnosis (see note 89). The diagnostic criteria further state that the hoarder’s objects congest the ‘active living areas’ of the home. Clearly in small homes this criteria will be more easily fulfilled; Frost and Steketee suggest in *Stuff* that ‘for those who can afford lots of space or help to manage a hoard, collecting may never reach a crisis level’ (p. 12). In British popular culture, hoarding is frequently presented as an affliction of the working class. Television shows such as ‘The Hoarder Next Door’ and ‘Britain’s Biggest Hoarders’ commonly although not exclusively portray hoarders from low socioeconomic brackets living in state-supported housing. Often the state’s intervention arises because of their responsibilities as landlord or environmental health enforcers, as in the case of Edmund Trebus (1918-2002), who was featured on the BBC documentary ‘A Life of Grime’ frequently battling with the council of the London borough of Haringey in which he lived. It follows that in council-owned housing, hoarding will be more readily identified as a problem practice. On Trebus, see Frost and Steketee, pp. 271-72.

¹⁰³ Merryweather, p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ James, *Principles*, p. 725.

¹⁰⁵ James, *Principles*, p. 726.

¹⁰⁶ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), p. 27.

hoarding, an idea which was present at all levels of print culture; Merryweather shares with James the belief that hoarding is a facet of miserliness, just another manifestation of the natural acquisitive instinct reigning unchecked.

The miser's acquisitive mania is at its most base and symbolic in the image of the hoarder who cannot release his grasp on his own shit. As Thompson describes, 'those individuals who make eccentric positive evaluations with respect to certain body-products and fill their chests of drawers with neatly wrapped parcels of their own excrement...are emphatically categorised as insane'.¹⁰⁷ Their evaluations of rubbish and durable are 'so intrusive and so threatening that not only must they be suppressed but must be seen to be suppressed'.¹⁰⁸ These hoarders *in extremis* highlight what is at the core of nineteenth-century museum culture's anxiety around excess. Kristeva identifies the abject as 'what disturbs identity, system, order'.¹⁰⁹ To encounter it is to confront the indeterminacy between subject and objects which the abject embodies; it 'draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses'.¹¹⁰ The hoarder's entrenched relationship with a world of ephemeral things that hover on the epistemic boundary of waste reminds us that we will eventually become objects, too. Museums' investiture in sustaining the distinction between bodies and objects falls down in the face of the abject, for to confront it is to find oneself 'at the border of [one's] condition as a living being'.¹¹¹ The question of whether the Harmon dust heaps might have contained human excrement begins to appear pertinent once more.

If the hoarder brings us face to face with our own mortality then their seemingly indiscriminate accumulation of objects also exposes us to the ultimate meaninglessness of our

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva, *An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹¹⁰ Kristeva, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Kristeva, p. 3.

world, an idea particularly poignant in post-Darwinian Victorian society. While museums spun meaning from the material world by presenting their objects framed as progress, the hoarder's undifferentiated revelry in endless accumulation echoes the claims of Darwinian evolutionary theory which had exposed progress as a fallacy and recast nature as a directionless, contingent world propelled by death and abundance. The hoard constitutes a refusal to impose boundaries, a rejection of *telos* and a material admission that there is no inherent meaning in nature's waste, merely that which we attribute. This helps us to understand the fear that collections might slip into hoards which seems manifest in the Victorian imagination. Gradualism gave new potency to the ephemeral and directly influenced the way in which nineteenth-century collectors thought about the need to preserve and record.¹¹² Thus, reflected in prolific collector Henry Cuming's attempts to trace the development of everyday items such as purses, spectacles and keys, we can observe an echo of Darwin's observation that 'the accumulation of innumerable slight variations'¹¹³ was what brought about change in the natural world.¹¹⁴ A heightened awareness of the irreversible nature of change, and the central role of the ephemeral in achieving it, gave collectors in the latter half of the nineteenth century an impetus not only to direct their efforts toward different kinds of objects, but also to accumulate more and more. Cuming's attempt to plot the improvement of the design of objects through minute changes between one model and the next is a quest for a meaningful story of progression through the preservation of specimens which will soon be superseded, an endeavour to

¹¹² See Jacob Gruber, 'Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 72:6 (1970), 1289-99.

¹¹³ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species and The Voyage of the Beagle* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 890.

¹¹⁴ This is especially true of famously prolific collector Henry Wellcome (see Frances Larson, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)). Wellcome believed that 'the slightest variation between two records was important' (p. 178) and collected hundreds of thousands of objects relating to medicine and anatomy. As it was, Wellcome's acquisitive practices far exceeded his attempts to systematise the collections, and hundreds of thousands of objects were stockpiled in warehouses until museum professionals began to sort through them after his death in 1936 (pp. 1-4). Henry Cuming's antiquarian research can be found as follows; 'History of Purses', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 14 (1858), 131-44; 'On Spectacles', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 11 (1855), 144-50; 'History of Keys', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 12 (1856), 117-29.

make material abundance mean. Gillian Beer describes how the 'difficult combination of urgency and massiveness' in Darwin's ideas stems from the attempt to balance 'his delight in the individual example and his sense of it as minute and transient when viewed within the extent of evolutionary time'.¹¹⁵ As Darwin's conflation of the virtuoso, miser, and naturalist identifies, all collectors share this 'delight' in objects, but the 'urgency and massiveness' of a post-Darwinian world made the collection's descent into hoard a more pertinent and pressing possibility.

¹¹⁵ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd. edn (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p. 37.

Chapter 5 – Collections at Home: Clutter and Bric-a-Brac in the Victorian Interior

One of the most potent images of Victorian superabundance is the domestic interior filled to the brim with frippery and ornament. The cluttered Victorian parlour has become a cliché, and a throwaway reference to antimacassars can invoke assumptions about exuberance in the nineteenth-century home that have as much to do with moral stuffiness as with aesthetics. In the twentieth century, a modernist aesthetic sought to distance itself as far as possible from the now-embarrassing plenitude in Victorian tastes which was apparent in many facets of Victorian society, design and interiors being only one aspect. Of course, a schism between late-Victorian and early twentieth-century modes of representation is as much an invention of writers and commentators as a material reality, and the Victorian movements of Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts paved the way for modernist aesthetics, which owe a huge debt to their ideas about simplicity and honesty in design. Virginia Woolf's 1928 description in *Orlando* of the exponential growth of things in the nineteenth century encapsulates the way that we think about the Victorian domestic interior;

Coffee supplanted the after-dinner port, and, as coffee led to a drawing-room in which to drink it, and a drawing-room to glass cases, and glass cases to artificial flowers, and artificial flowers to mantelpieces, and mantelpieces to pianofortes, and pianofortes to drawing-room ballads, and drawing-room ballads (skipping a stage or two) to innumerable little dogs, mats, and china ornaments, the home – which had become extremely important – was completely altered.¹

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), pp. 112-13.

Woolf's prose suggests an unthinking inevitability to the growth of 'stuff', that abundance occurred without plot or reflection and that it was accepted, celebrated even. But as this chapter argues, Victorians were not ambivalent about the abundance of things in their society, and least of all in their homes. Just how much was too much, in the Victorian interior? What can overstuffed interiors tell us about how Victorians interacted with their things outside of museum and shopping environments? And most pertinently, how did ideas about things in the home impact upon the perception of the collector's things – both in terms of their number and their placement? This chapter, as a study not of interiors themselves but of the rhetoric around abundance as it applied to the domestic space, attempts to situate the domestic collection within debates about the proper design and furnishing of the interior. The home was, of course, the site in which most private collections resided. In the Victorian literary imagination, the collection's abundance threatened the harmony of the domestic space, and this fear was not unfounded – the overwhelmed and overwhelming home of the Cuming family attests to this. This chapter seeks to establish what decorative and aesthetic boundaries the domestic collector was in danger of transgressing. It attempts to distinguish how the domestic collection was differentiated from bric-a-brac, and considers how what it contained, how it was displayed, and who collected it, might have an impact on these categories.

The home's exalted status in Victorian culture is attested to by the swathes of manuals, periodicals and encyclopaedias published throughout the century which set out the conditions and materials required to attain the ideal domestic space. It is important first to recognise the vast changes in interior fashions which occurred throughout the century; changes in the use, aesthetics and ideology of the home have been exhaustively documented by historians of the interior Judith Flanders, Deborah Cohen, and Thad Logan,

amongst many others.² We cannot speak with a broad brush about ‘Victorian’ interiors without acknowledging heterogeneity, not just in the decor of the homes themselves, but also in the idea of the ideal home. What was fashionable in 1840 was dated by 1890, and those who wrote about the home did not do so with one voice – what was advised by Mrs Talbot Coke in *Hearth and Home* might have seemed ‘pretentious uselessness’ or ‘showy discomfort’ to Mrs Orrinsmith.³ Nevertheless, in the final three decades of the century, the public conversation around interior decor and furnishings came to be dominated by the aesthetic reform movement, as it spawned numerous books and articles of interior advice authored by both women and men. These texts, on which this chapter focuses, proceeded on broad principles of honest design, harmonious furnishings, and the expulsion of unnecessary ornament from the home. They became ‘central to the on-going discourse of domesticity’ and represent a substantial and coherent body of popular literature.⁴ The aesthetic reform movement encompassed a number of authors whose ideas were based in the principles of both Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts: Charles Eastlake was a populariser of William Morris’s ideas about hand-wrought crafts; Lucy Orrinsmith was a part of the Morris circle and worked for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.; Rosamund Marriott Watson also wrote as the poet Graham R. Thomson and was published in *The Yellow Book*; Clarence Cook’s *The House Beautiful*, published in 1878, was illustrated by Walter Crane. Although distinct in both their political and aesthetic aims, the two movements shared a belief that the home was a crucial site for both the formation and display of character, and stressed, therefore, the importance of the careful curation of domestic spaces.⁵

² Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: HarperCollins, 2003); Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ These are descriptions of the ordinary Victorian drawing room given by Lucy Orrinsmith in her 1878 book *The Drawing Room: Its Decorations and Furniture* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), part of W. J. Loftie’s ‘Art at Home’ series.

⁴ Logan, p. 61.

⁵ For recent reconsiderations of the relationship between the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements, see Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart, eds, *Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867-1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

Many books of the aesthetic reform movement take a tone that implies they are battling a tide of stuff and superfluity in middle-class Victorian homes. They implore their readers to exercise restraint in their decorative efforts and condemn excess of ornament in the strongest possible terms. The architect Robert W. Edis provided advice on interior decoration for Shirley Forster Murphy's enormous 1883 tome, *Our Homes and How to Make them Healthy*. Writing of the recent past, he claims that

...ordinary English homes were fitted up either in the dreariest monotony of commonplaceness, or made gaudy with paper-hangings and floor-coverings of vulgar colouring and design. The carpets were covered with sprawling festoons of flowers, or with impossible grotesques of birds, beasts, and reptiles, in utterly unnatural treatment and senseless repetition. Flock papers of monotonous shades darkened our rooms and acted as traps for collecting all the filth and dust that could be absorbed from foul and unhealthy vapours, or collected from the dirt and smoke that gradually accumulate in every house. Not only were they inartistic and subversive of that mental enjoyment or pleasure which good and harmonious colouring tends to produce, but absolutely unhealthy; engendering a feeling of stuffiness and impurity, by constant absorption and accumulation of ...various impurities...⁶

The excess which characterises this mid-Victorian interior is, for Edis, both morally and physically degrading. Unnecessarily three-dimensional elaboration on walls caught the dust and rendered homes 'impure', passing this dirtiness on to inhabitants and corrupting their 'mental enjoyment'. At the beginning of Victoria's reign, the very popular *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, published in 1838 and written by horticulturalist J. C. Loudon, advocates that the walls of the home should be 'covered with engravings or other pictures', and that carpets should be 'of a well-covered pattern, in circles or

⁶ Robert W. Edis, 'Internal Decoration', in *Our Homes and How to Make them Healthy*, ed. by Shirley Forster Murphy (London: Cassell and Company, 1883), pp. 309-64 (p. 313).

octagons, with rich brown colours, and flowers &c., of glowing tints, looking warm and comfortable, and like home'.⁷ Thirty years later, the advocating in print of such material embellishments would be unthinkable. Edis's mention of 'impossible' and 'unnatural' representations of themes from nature which appear on carpets hint at the influence of aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, both of which advocated a return to 'honesty' in design and a move away from unnecessary ornament. In this long treatise, Edis rails against gimcracks, trumpery, sham and deceit in design, advocating for clean lines, simplicity of ornament, and 'truthfulness', so that the function of everyday objects is not obscured, for 'if you are content to teach a lie in your belongings, you can hardly wonder at petty deceptions being practised in other ways'.⁸

Edis's conflation of material and moral deception is exemplary of the attitude, established in the nineteenth century, that a close connection existed between individuals and their domestic environment. Midcentury design reformers such as Henry Cole and Owen Jones had based their efforts on the principle that the cultivation of aesthetic taste was morally enriching, and these ideas directly affected the ways that Victorians thought about their homes and how they were decorated and furnished. Deborah Cohen has described in detail the ways in which goods were 'endowed with meaning' by design reformers; 'what one owned, bought, and treasured', she says, 'helped to shape – and hence also communicate – something of the moral make-up of a person'.⁹ The things people chose to keep about them were not just reflective of their taste, but their personality, too, and so the home became a space in which to both display and maintain one's principles. As the question of the improvement of taste took on a moral as well as aesthetic imperative, the vast literature of home decoration espoused honesty and simplicity in interior design. Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, pioneering sisters who were the first women to establish their

⁷ J. C. Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, (New York: Garland, 1982), p. 88.

⁸ Edis, p. 356.

⁹ Cohen, p. 19.

own interior decorating firm, wrote in 1876 that above all else, one's guiding principle for decoration ought to be to 'never go out of your way to make a thing or a material look like what it is not', or to 'hide the construction of your house or any part of your furniture.'¹⁰ Ornamental and imitative design was roundly renounced, and excess declared to be reflective of a deeper immorality.

Those who advocated unfussy design and the loss of unnecessary ornament also, by extension, advocated a careful approach to accumulation. The rhetoric of immoral excess encompassed domestic interiors filled to the brim with knick knacks, specimens, books, pictures and photographs. Shirley Hibberd's 1856 *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste* declares that so long as we surround our domestic selves 'with emblems and suggestions of higher things, so long will the highest teachings of knowledge, elegance, and virtue be attainable at the fireside'.¹¹ In an echo of Madame Merle's famous declaration 18 years previously that one's self 'overflows into everything that belongs to us',¹² the poet and critic Rosamund Marriott Watson wrote in her 1897 book *The Art of the House* that 'it were difficult to over-estimate the intimacy of the relations between ourselves and what, for want of a better word, may be called our setting. Like hermit crabs we gather round us a medley of objects, present and recollected, that become almost a part of our personality.'¹³ As such, then 'the relation between the individual and her possessions was...fundamentally reciprocal',¹⁴ and it became important to surround oneself with objects which both portrayed and encouraged positively defined character traits such as honesty, piety and, crucially, taste.

¹⁰ Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), pp. 17-18.

¹¹ Shirley Hibberd, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste and Recreations for Town Folk in the Study and Imitation of Nature* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1856), p. iv.

¹² Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. by Robert D. Bamberg, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 175.

¹³ Rosamund Marriott Watson, *The Art of the House* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897), pp. 152-53.

¹⁴ Cohen, p. 138.

The prescriptive instructions contained within many domestic advice manuals, even as they purport to promote an approach to decor which embraces the individual creativity and personality of their readers, have given rise to Thad Logan's suggestion that manuals probably created as much unease about the creation of the perfect interior as they allayed.¹⁵ The Garretts admonish in their 1876 book *Suggestions for House Decoration* that 'before we exhibit our tastes we should take care that they are so far cultivated as to make it desirable to display them at all'.¹⁶ The remainder of their book is correspondingly anxiety-inducing; the sisters are scathing about women who try too hard in the same breath that they set out a series of rules for décor which, they admit, are highly demanding, writing that 'a good general effect can only be produced by minute and somewhat tedious attention to details'.¹⁷ No wonder women were worried to put a foot wrong when it came to furnishing their homes. An 1883 *Punch* article satirises this heightened sensitivity to decor; the title of 'Art too much at home' riffs on 'Art at Home', the title of the series to which the Garretts' book formed the second volume (*A Plea for Art in the House*, written by the series editor, the Reverend William John Loftie, was the first.) In this short parody, a party of visitors led by the aptly named Lady de Snookyns are led into a family home to make acquaintance with the owners. Whilst they wait for their hosts, they conduct a 'tour of inspection' around the drawing-room, the discovery of every ornament leading them to worsening conclusions about their owners: photographs cause the accusation that they are 'partial to the professions'; a sofa, the design of which is 'new in Oxford Street, but old in Spain' reveals their lack of travel; an 'inappropriate flower-pot' causes Lady de Snookyns to cry that they are 'absolutely out of *any* sort of society!'¹⁸ As a site of display of not only gentility and taste, but also morality and personality, the home could be a site of intense scrutiny, and Lady de Snookyns takes the fashion for reading that space to its extreme. After observing 'a scoop used for tasting cheese' reposing in the

¹⁵ Logan, p. 218.

¹⁶ Garrett and Garrett, p. 68.

¹⁷ Garrett and Garrett, p. 6.

¹⁸ [Anon.], 'Art Too Much at Home', *Punch*, 3 February 1883, p. 52.

room, Lady de Snookyns and her party make haste to leave, as the shop-object betrays the family's commercial, rather than genteel, origins (origins which, ironically, de Snookyns herself shares).¹⁹

De Snookyns' deductions about the character of her hosts from the appointment of their 'palatial drawing-room' marks the home out as a site in which the importance of display is especially heightened. The objects of the interior provide her with a series of cues from which to piece together a narrative of origins for the family. This mode of encounter recalls Victorian visits to museum and gallery spaces, whereby visual apprehension of the spatial arrangement of objects on display was the primary means of interpretation. Thus, the aesthetic reform movement shared with museum culture an emphasis on the importance of careful curation and display. Both acknowledged, through this emphasis, the powerful polysemy of objects and their ability to absorb and transmit a multitude of meanings. In the home, as in the museum, one had to keep close control of objects to ensure that the story being told was the right one. The language of interior advice was often suggestive of objects' tendency to overflow with unwanted meaning, and strict curation was required to control it. Just as it was in the museum, clutter was anathema to the ideal home, and its elimination was one of the main targets of the aesthetic reform movement. Watson complains that bedrooms have become 'cluttered with trivialities, tiny tables, lamp-stands, flower-stands, irresponsibly meandering chairs', her words suggestive of the worrisome epistemological independence of objects.²⁰ Unrelenting vigilance, she claims, is the remedy to the reign of this superfluous and self-determining clutter. The construction of the 'House Beautiful', the aesthetics' ideal, requires one's 'courage, sacrifice, and repression'.²¹ Watson continues:

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Watson, p. 79.

²¹ Watson, p. 4.

It will be something in the nature of a domestic tyranny that you thus establish. Are you a collector, you cannot bring home a new vase, a picture, a fresh acquisition of any sort that promises the remotest chance of upsetting the reigning scheme. A book with a gay cover, a time-table, a newspaper, a magazine, each and all of these blameless commodities might create a revolution in this little world, where things go wrong so easily.²²

This is careful curation, leaning toward the abstemious, written as a strict behavioural code which requires the curtailment of the desire to acquire, which Watson understands, as William James did, as a natural impulse. The aesthetic balance of the home is presented as constantly under threat from the arrival of a new object into the 'little world' of the interior. In her language, things have a will of their own, requiring the guiding hand of the decorator to arrange them into submission. Watson writes that 'your pieces of furniture, very refined, very fit, and *very few*, are to be disposed here and there after anxious premeditation and earnest thought'.²³ This studied approach to the appropriately aesthetic selection and dispatch of one's things is contrasted with a seemingly unthinking attitude to accumulation and display that results in a home filled with, and almost ruled by, the furniture and ornament that proliferates within it, as Watson bemoans the 'uneven tenor' of the amateur, who 'heap[s] together objects' that 'disparage and nullify each the other's charms when forced into companionship.'²⁴ Figuring the home-maker as ruler over a kingdom of objects, Watson's decorative regime ensures that through appropriate accumulation and display, the right kinds of meanings can be elicited from the interior.

Watson's words also constitute an attack on the heterogeneity of accumulated objects which might threaten the harmony of the House Beautiful. Any out of place item could

²² Watson, pp. 5-6.

²³ Watson, p. 4, emphasis added.

²⁴ Watson, p. 1.

spoil the effect, disrupt the congruity of the home, the 'little world, where things go wrong so easily,' and accordingly the judicious deployment of objects was a central principle of the aesthetic reform movement. Charles Eastlake urged owners of ornamental objects to 'associate and group them together as much as possible', and display them on shelves in the dining room or library.²⁵ 'A little museum may thus be formed', he writes, 'and remain a source of lasting pleasure to its possessors.'²⁶ In this visually logical display, the domestic collection could imitate the principles of museum display. The important thing was to distinguish ornamental objects so that each could be appreciated both on its own terms and in relation to the group of which it formed a part. This practice of setting aside decorative or collected objects in a specially-designated area meant that the ideal domestic interior was never overrun by things. Watson's appeal to collectors to curb their acquisitive habits and deny themselves the 'fresh acquisition' in the service of aesthetic harmony demonstrates that a spreading collection was understood as a threat to the ideal home as 'a place that pleases and satisfies both eye and intellect at once'.²⁷ Eastlake may have written fondly of the 'lasting pleasure' afforded by the 'little museum', but later writers expressed the need for strict control even of these limited spaces. Loftie was vehement in his objection to the prolific display of objects in the home; 'I do not want everyone collecting. I do not admire private museums. I think houses which are ugly and badly furnished and uncomfortable, are none the better for being filled with curiosities...if you have curiosities, which are not works of art, to display, you must be very careful not to turn your room into a museum.'²⁸ Rhoda and Agnes Garrett expressed similar sentiments; '[a]nother error, against which we all need warning, amateurs and decorators alike, is the danger of overloading our rooms with ornament...some of our most highly-decorated houses bear a resemblance to museums, a resemblance always most strictly to be

²⁵ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1869), p. 121.

²⁶ Eastlake, p. 122.

²⁷ Watson, p. 3.

²⁸ W.J. Loftie, *A Plea for Art in the House* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), pp. 22, 31.

avoided.’²⁹ These warnings against ‘overloaded’ and ‘filled’ interiors demonstrate that the injunction against abundance in museum settings extended to the home, too.

For the serious amateur collector, glass cabinets could be constructed and drawers installed, to house one’s (presumably systematically compiled) coins or fossils. In his huge 1864 book *The Gentleman’s House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace*, architect Robert Kerr gives suggestions for the positioning and furnishing of libraries and museums in large mansions. Smaller properties would probably accommodate just a library, but Kerr notes that it might contain ‘a scientific Museum’ or ‘a collection of curious or artistic objects’ that might require particular fixtures and fittings.³⁰ In either case, the most important principle is that things are ordered: when neatly categorised, filed, and displayed, such items, even in great abundance, do not threaten to spill into the rest of the home. They are set apart, made museum. Kerr’s instructions make clear the importance of organising in such a way that objects in the collection are easily accessible to both the eye and the hand, emphasising their value as objects of study, and thus the collection’s status as useful. Kerr was responsible for the design of some of Victorian Britain’s most palatial country houses. His plans for English residences did not extend to the bourgeois parlours which Victorian domestic collections commonly inhabited and which were the targets of the aesthetic reform movement, but his instructions are indicative of a genteel ideal. Even in smaller residences this marked separation could be retained: as Thad Logan suggests, ‘[w]hile serious amateur collectors most often had the means to keep their specimens in a library, the parlour was frequently a repository for the small collection or the interesting single item, especially in more modest households.’³¹ The importance of the collection’s identity as a discrete entity is one

²⁹ Garrett and Garrett, p. 20.

³⁰ Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman’s House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace* (London: John Murray, 1864), p. 132.

³¹ Logan, p. 146.

of Victorian culture's most enduring legacies, and is now enshrined in the language of pathology, as explored in the previous chapter.

Few interior advice books addressed their readers as collectors as Kerr's tome did, but most assumed that the domestic interior would be home to an accumulation of objects, and gave instruction for the appropriate selection and display of such ornament. Eastlake writes that '[t]he smallest example of rare old porcelain, of ivory carving, of ancient metal-work, of enamels, of Venetian glass, of anything which illustrates good design and skilful workmanship, should be acquired whenever possible, and treasured with the greatest care', whilst Orrinsmith advises that "'[w]hat shall be added next?" should be a constantly-recurring thought' and goes on to suggest 'a Persian tile, an Algerian flower-pot, an old Flemish cup, a piece of Nankin blue, an Icelandic spoon, a Japanese cabinet, a Chinese fan; a hundred things might be named'.³² Orrinsmith and Eastlake recommend only objects which exhibit exemplary design or craftsmanship, for to be in the presence of these things is to experience their improving effect. 'It is' Eastlake writes, 'impossible to overrate the influence which such objects may have in educating the eye to appreciate what really constitutes good art'.³³ In Eastlake's ideal home, the furnishings themselves are agents of improvement, so that merely to dwell in the home is to absorb 'a valuable lesson in decorative form and colour' from one's possessions.³⁴ Furnishing the home, then, was akin to useful collecting because it involved the acquisition of objects in order to benefit from the 'lessons' which careful curation could extract from the things themselves. Orrinsmith concurs, writing that 'in the work and thought requisite to bring about a desirable and satisfactory result in our drawing-room, there is much healthy contentment and refining of the nature. The search after objects of charming colour and delicate form, and

³² Orrinsmith, pp. 132, 133.

³³ Eastlake, p. 121.

³⁴ Ibid.

intercourse with them, are in themselves a perpetual education'.³⁵ In order to properly furnish one needed to educate oneself about good design and good taste, so that the act of seeking, evaluating, selecting and purchasing furnishings was an edifying pursuit. As such, this furnishing, understood through the prism of useful accumulation, came to resemble the Victorian ideal of collecting - instructive, improving, and exhibited for the benefit of others. According to the ideals of the aesthetic reform movement, the practice of furnishing existed in the same moral universe as collecting natural history specimens or stamps.

Loftie's *A Plea for Art in the House* begins with a chapter entitled 'the prudence of collecting', in which he sets out several anecdotal examples of economically advantageous collecting. As a paean to the financial prudence of collecting rather than its aesthetic virtues, it is a somewhat incongruous way for Loftie to begin, constituting, as it does, the opening of a series of books entitled 'Art at Home'. Whilst Loftie acknowledges that collecting is 'both good and pleasant in itself', it is also a pecuniary pursuit; the collector, he writes 'does good work for the knowledge of art, and he increases the value of each individual specimen in his collection.'³⁶ Even the improvement of 'the knowledge of art' is framed here as financially advantageous. For Loftie, collecting seems to be primarily an investment activity; he writes of the 'prudent...economy' of a collector of printed books whose foregoing of small luxuries such as cabs and cigars enabled him to add to a collection which, upon his death, 'will materially add to the resources of his family'.³⁷ At points, then, Loftie writes about collected objects primarily as commodities in which money can appreciate; they are collected with their return to the market a foregone conclusion. But Loftie's idealised collectors are never entirely taken over by their fervent enthusiasm for the value of their objects, and their activities are always of benefit to

³⁵ Orrinsmith, p. 8.

³⁶ Loftie, pp. 16, 7.

³⁷ Loftie, p. 16.

others, either financially or aesthetically. In fact, Loftie condemns in the strongest terms those collectors who allow their habit to rule either their heart or their home.

Too many men collect only for their own private gratification; and it may be as well before we go further to draw a sharp line between the man who gathers objects in which he alone is interested, and the man who desires to beautify his house with what he buys...Art at Home is art calculated to give pleasure to as many as possible in the home, and to make its rooms as pretty and attractive as possible. The bibliomaniac too often forgets others in his comparatively solitary pursuit, and the collector of autographs can have but little regard for the pleasures of his family. If things are only bought to be stowed away in portfolios and cupboards, they are merely money laid by to accumulate.³⁸

The closing words of this passage indicate Loftie's essential rejection of collecting as fundamentally an investment activity, because to wholly endorse such a perspective would be to condone the self-interest and impotence of the miser; collectors, misers and hoarders all take things (whether that be paintings, gold coins, or old books) out of useful circulation. Loftie positions the collector as in constant danger of slipping into the category of miser, and, crucially, it is display which prevents that slide by ensuring the collection's utility through access, transforming it from a narcissistic indulgence to a site of education and shared social improvement. Loftie's keenness for collecting, then, is located in that activity's utility, both in terms of its potential to yield economic results and its ability to elevate the tastes of those who inhabit the home. However the fulfilment of each of these conditions was contingent upon the collection's focus on the right kind of objects.

³⁸ Loftie, p. 21.

Too frequently for the tastes of the aesthetic reform movement, nineteenth-century domestic spaces were filled with objects which were worthy of neither study nor aesthetic appreciation. Victorian Britain offered new vistas for collectors of knick-knacks. Innovations in manufacturing and the spread of department stores and boutiques meant that odds and ends such as pin cushions, decorative fans, and heavily ornamented vases, alongside a whole host of other decorative and ornamental items were readily available as they had never been before. The 'eruption of objects in the home' would have been impossible without developments in machine-led production,³⁹ and they attracted the ire of almost every writer on the subject of interior decor and taste. Even Mrs Talbot Coke, who provided kindly interior decor advice through her column in *Hearth and Home* magazine, and encouraged the acquisition of 'pretty odds and ends', wrote with disgust of the 'chamber of horrors' that one might create if one purchased the 'rickety wicker-easels with "Stanley hats" in plated rush' and 'the poor seaside spade, criss-crossed with ribbon...with a bulging plush pin cushion glued on its blade.'⁴⁰ Watson writes that such 'abominations increase and multiply accordingly with the horrid fecundity of most organisms that are low down in the scale of existence,' in a way that both foreshadows Woolf's rendering of the unstoppable spread of things 31 years later and vividly illustrates the contempt in which design reformers held the outputs of industrial manufacture.⁴¹ Writers of the aesthetic reform movement rallied against the influx of these objects into Victorian homes. Charles Eastlake, in 1851's *Hints on Household Taste*, condemns '[t]he silly knickknacks which too frequently crowd a drawing-room table, chiffonier, or mantelpiece', calling them 'that heterogeneous assemblage of modern rubbish which, under the head of 'china ornaments' and various other names, finds its way into the drawing-room or boudoir.'⁴² Similarly, Orrinsmith in 1878 bemoans that such monstrosities as 'coal-scuttles ornamented with highly-coloured views of, say, Warwick

³⁹ Logan, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Talbot Coke, 'On Odds and Ends', *Hearth and Home*, 12 November 1896, pp. 14-15 (p. 15).

⁴¹ Watson, p. 106.

⁴² Eastlake, pp. 113, 121.

Castle; *papier-mâché* chairs inlaid or painted with natural flowers or pictures; hearthrugs with dogs after Landseer in their *proper* colours' are 'still not infrequently seen', suggesting the design reformers' continued fight against the superabundance of cheap decorative objects and the Victorian public's resistance to their prescriptions.⁴³

Watson is the most vitriolic of all the interior advice writers toward knick-knacks and gimcracks in the home. She is quite fantastically scathing about the 'cheap allurements of the frankly execrable productions of the novelty-monger'.⁴⁴ Little ornaments such as pin pots in the shape of happy canines are 'offspring of the intellectual gutter', 'commercial fungi bred of the debased longings of the greater number'.⁴⁵ She ascribes the 'predominance of zeal over discrimination', to 'the influence of fashion', which works to stimulate consumer desire for novelty.⁴⁶ This 'craving in the great heart of the people' acts, in Watson's formulation, to feed an industry focussed purely on the creation of new objects, with no regard for their aesthetic value.⁴⁷ Talbot Coke complained that women who allowed their tastes to be dictated by fashions 'read nothing between the lines, *know* nothing, and care less, about the undercurrent which flows through most of our lives, and of which it is so deeply interesting midst all the levelling artificiality of modern society to catch a glimpse now and then...their rooms are therefore crammed with the rubbish of the year, the "latest novelty" runs rampant therein'.⁴⁸ A craze for chenille monkeys seems to have particularly upset Coke; she caught one, in the house of someone who ought to have known better, 'perched on a frame, apparently trying to catch the photographic eye of the Archbishop of Canterbury!'⁴⁹ This comical and apparently flippant observation serves to dramatise the disparity between new manufactures and older structures of power and

⁴³ Orrinsmith, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Watson, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Watson, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁷ Watson, pp. 105-06.

⁴⁸ Talbot Coke, 'Our Things', *Hearth and Home*, 9 July 1891, p. 244.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

value; the chenille monkey is contrasted with an image deeply rooted in history and tradition. Coke's allusion to the 'levelling artificiality' which is now so readily available suggests that her problem with the new things of fashion is that they allow people to purchase cultural capital who had never before had access to it. Coke echoes the sentiments of *Punch's* Lady de Snookyns, who is so upset by the realisation that her host's things reveal the family's beginnings in the professions. Anyone with a little money could collect knick-knacks, but to collect the right *sort* of things required some level of accomplishment or connoisseurship. Thus the display of objects in the home became subject to new cultural rules, rules enforced by interior advice manuals and the aesthetic reform movement.⁵⁰

The complaints from Watson and Coke about new gimcracks and novelties foreshadow Benjamin's famous proclamations about 'the disintegration of the aura' experienced during the Victorian era.⁵¹ For Benjamin, industrial capitalism threatened the aura which clung to objects, as the creations of mass production were mere commodities, with nothing of the numinous sense of history or 'traces of the practised hand' that linger around old things.⁵² Indeed, the kinds of objects which Watson would have her reader include in the home were those which carried a sense of history and meaning with them. Her description of the auratic appeal of a tea set speaks directly to Benjamin's ideas about the creation and transmission of aura:

It is indisputable that a certain atmosphere of romance must always cling to an old china tea-service, and not to the service alone, but to all the manifold appurtenances of its dainty equipage. An atmosphere born partly of association with a courtly age,

⁵⁰ See Rémy Saisselin, *Bricabracomania: The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp. 71-72 for a more detailed study of this process.

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 185.

⁵² Benjamin, p. 182.

not too remote for realisation in thought, and yet sufficiently far for the enchantment of distance; partly of the obvious antithesis - the unappealing pathos, if you will - that attaches to all frail inanimate things of intimate usage that have long survived their possessors, passing from hand to hand, from hearth to hearth, hung round with lost memories and garlanded with faded circumstance as with dead flowers. Every day that comes and goes is the day of small things, and small things have a power and dignity of their own that only the dull may despise.⁵³

Watson's parting shot to 'the dull' here outlines how rules about taste and appreciation could serve to establish class delineations where old material markers had been eroded by the new availability of decorative objects. Her description of the tea set 'garlanded' with the memories of 'intimate usage' positions it as an auratic object, a relic of everyday life. Watson's reverent description of this numinous item works to advocate a 'deep' relationship to material things, one which is based around a sense of their histories and individual lives. The passage is also suggestive of one of the many ways that the home, despite its potential to become a site of display, fostered different relationships with things than could be had in museum settings. The home could be a site of intimate relations with things, unlike the museum where an objective stance was demanded of visitors. In domestic spaces, the auratic properties of things that Watson describes might be both created and felt.

Although many declared them to be in poor taste, the availability of cheaply-produced, auratically-sparse articles meant that they could be, and often were, enthusiastically accumulated in homes and cabinets across the land. '[I]t was this ubiquity and clutter', Rémy Saisselin writes, 'that turned into bric-a-brac.'⁵⁴ Saisselin's extended 1985 study of how the meanings (or non-meanings) of bric-a-brac were formed in the arcades and

⁵³ Watson, p. 112.

⁵⁴ Saisselin, p. 70.

homes of nineteenth-century France constitutes an important account of the role that consumer desire played in populating the domestic interior. For Saisselin, the display of commodities in commercial settings was heavily implicated in the cluttering of the interior, for it 'induced a state of desire that transcended need,' and it is this association with excess which is a definitive feature of bric-a-brac.⁵⁵ The term 'bric-a-brac' was applied to a wide variety of objects that proliferated in the Victorian era, such that some have suggested that the term chiefly came to refer to heterogeneity rather than any one class of objects.⁵⁶ Indeed, although we might now primarily associate the term with the cheap, mass produced goods resulting from industrial production, the term was used by Victorians to designate groups of things which included finely-crafted objects, too. Edmond de Goncourt applied the term to his own collection, which was anything but cheap.⁵⁷ An object's classification as bric-a-brac, therefore, was contingent, not merely on any intrinsic properties that the object might itself hold, but also on its position within a set of other objects. Since bric-a-brac was figured as excess and superfluity it follows that even high-status or finely crafted objects could 'descend' to the status of bric-a-brac if they appeared in disordered great numbers. For the moral economy of Victorian Britain, ideas about waste and excess centred, as we have seen, around the concept of 'usefulness', and in its stubborn uselessness, bric-a-brac was a category of objects defined by excess.

Saisselin's work details the importance of gendered modes of consumption to both the rise of the category of bric-a-brac and the values assigned to it. His description of how the 'bibelotization of the interior came to be regarded as a particularly feminine trait to be distinguished from the more manly enterprise of collecting works of art' has formed a fundamental part of this study's emphasis on how the culture policed appropriate

⁵⁵ Saisselin, p. 33.

⁵⁶ See Victoria Mills, 'Bricabracomania! Collecting, Corporeality, and the Problem of Things in Victorian Fiction, in *Literary Bric-à-Brac and the Victorians*, ed. by Jen Harrison and Jonathan Shears (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 33-47 (p. 35). MyiLibrary ebook.

⁵⁷ See Saisselin, p. xiv; Mills, 'Bricabracomania!', p. 41.

collecting, and therefore how objects were allowed to mean.⁵⁸ Saisselin writes that 'the bourgeois collection was not necessarily a gallery or collection geared to some historical view of the development of art or the visual expression of some guiding aesthetic or historical principle...it tended to bric-a-brac, clutter, accumulation.'⁵⁹ Like the hoard, one of the factors in the identification of bric-a-brac is the lack of a guiding principle or central narrative behind its acquisition. The distinction between the accumulation of objects for decor, on the one hand, and for education and moral improvement, on the other, sets out how the proliferation of objects in the interior came to be regarded as distinct from the category of 'collecting', even though the interior might form the home for that collecting.⁶⁰ Thus it was that, as Tim Dolin describes, '[t]he female collection...was virtually invisible as a cultural pursuit because its meaning was comprehended by the meanings attaching to domestic ideology';⁶¹ that is, women's accumulations were never recognised as 'collections' in the same way that men's were, but were subsumed under the rubric 'furnishings', indistinguishable from the interiors which they inhabited. In this way, the accumulation of bric-a-brac was figured not as collecting but as an impulsive, barely-theorised exercise of consumer desire. As Saisselin puts it; '[w]omen were consumers of objects; men were collectors. Women bought to decorate and for sheer joy of buying, but men had a vision for their collections, a view of the collection as an ensemble, with a philosophy behind it.'⁶² It is for this reason that the habits of some of nineteenth-century literature's excessive collectors register on their frames as frailty and femininity. Those

⁵⁸ Saisselin, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Saisselin, p. 65.

⁶⁰ Thorstein Veblen powerfully suggested in 1899 that we might understand excessive interior decor as 'conspicuous consumption' – a way of 'demonstrating the possession of wealth' through the consumption and display of goods that have no useful purpose, or, as Veblen terms them, 'waste' (*The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), p. 64). But as Theodor Adorno has written in 'Veblen's Attack on Culture' (in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), Veblen's theory operates on the assumption that the only relationship between human and object that is possible is one of functionality; whatever is beyond a tool or instrument at the level of subsistence, Veblen calls excess. Thus to suggest that the interior's clutter is a form of emulative conspicuous consumption is to ignore that our relationships to our things can be multifaceted and affective, a fact that Victorians knew only too well.

⁶¹ Tim Dolin, *Mistress of the House: Women of Property in the Victorian Novel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p. 38.

⁶² Saisselin, p. 68.

that collected 'too much' were associated with a gendered, consumptive corporeality; as their acquisitive habits were feminized, so were their bodies, so that often the male collector was written as pale and weak or in some manner physically degraded.⁶³

The enjoyment of bric-a-brac, of excess, was a decidedly feminine pursuit, and nothing could be anathema to the museal project of material meaning-making more than the unthinking accumulation and distribution of myriad things. Decorative objects in the home which existed in great numbers and which were not explicitly set apart in spaces which imitated museal modes of useful or instructive display – such as those advocated by Eastlake and Kerr – might slip, epistemologically, into bric-a-brac, an imaginative move made especially easy when those objects were the cheap trifles which were sold to a predominantly female market. If the careful ordering, labelling and categorisation of the useful collection gave way to more diffuse modes of display, and seemingly haphazard approaches to acquisition, if objects spilled out of cabinets and onto mantelpieces, sideboards, and occasional tables, they registered in Victorian culture as bric-a-brac, superfluity and waste. Read from the point of view of excess, the threat posed by the seemingly 'blameless commodities' which constitute bric-a-brac becomes apparent. James Bunn writes that bric-a-brac 'seems to undermine the meaningfulness of useful exchange, in both economic and epistemological terms';⁶⁴ bric-a-brac's superfluity disrupts both the category of the commodity and the useful collection's ideal of making meaning through things. To have too much threatens the various systems by which value is created: selection, classification, meaningful display. Thus the lines drawn in Victorian culture between what might be called a collection and what was mere clutter or bric-a-brac could be understood as delineating how material can be made to mean, and who can make it do so. Understanding the nineteenth-century meanings and non-meanings of clutter is

⁶³ See Mills, 'Bricabracomania!'.
⁶⁴ James H. Bunn, 'The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism', *New Literary History*, 11:2 (1980), 303-21 (p. 315).

therefore significant for our readings of Victorian injunctions on collectors not to let their collections outstrip their capacity to display them: not to collect 'too much'.

Of course these dictats about the domestic interior and what it should and should not house were variously adhered to and ignored, just as they would be today; our views inside the Cuming house alone attest to that. It would seem, as Logan suggests, that the 'powerful and deeply felt arguments' of design reformers 'went only so far in affecting the way decoration was practiced among the general population.'⁶⁵ In fact, she claims, 'by the late 1880s, after years of advice on decoration, the ornamental clutter of middle-class houses had increased, rather than decreased'.⁶⁶ Victorian Britons seemed to enjoy the superabundance and variety of things in their homes, adding to their furnishings as means allowed and perhaps deriving from them an aesthetic or intellectual fulfilment which is inaccessible to us now.⁶⁷ Just as the building of a collection was an ongoing, complex process, so was the curation of the home, and people added to the furnishings and ornament in their homes as they could, and wished to. As ornate furnishings went out of fashion, some things stayed on, and some things were replaced. As new innovations became more affordable, old things were stashed away. According to Deborah Cohen, at the start of the nineteenth century, people typically furnished their homes just once in their lifetime, usually upon marriage. However, by the end of the century, people would renew their décor every seven years or so, 'while constantly embellishing rooms with newly-purchased bric-à-brac'.⁶⁸ What happened to all the excess that was created? Where did the superfluity of the Victorian parlour find its new home?

⁶⁵ Logan, p. 111.

⁶⁶ Logan, p. 103.

⁶⁷ For an elaboration on the suggestion that the Victorian interior's clutter might have held meanings that are beyond our 21st century comprehension, see Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart, 'The Victorian Interior: A Collaborative, Eclectic Introduction', *Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867-1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts* ed. by Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 1-18.

⁶⁸ Cohen, p. 33.

Chapter 6 – Ordinary Hoarders: The Lumber Room

The Victorian interior developed a particular spatial strategy with which to address the vast amount of waste generated by fashion – the lumber room. The lumber room, in which old and superfluous furniture was stored, is no longer a feature of modern houses and we more commonly think of ‘lumber’ as timber. A comment of Charles Eastlake’s on the follies of fashion suggests how the semantic slippage occurred. ‘It is hardly too much to say’, he writes disparagingly, ‘that fifty years hence all the contents of our modern upholsterers’ shops will have fallen into useless lumber, only fit to be burnt for firewood.’¹ Of course what goes on the fire combusts and provides new energy – to burn lumber is to subject the furnishings to a kind of death, but the matter itself, in our modern vernacular, to a form of recycling. Fittingly, then, the lumber room of the Victorian household was a place in which morally embarrassing old and outmoded goods could languish; not quite waste, and not quite useful. Rather, the lumber room was full of the promise that things might be used again. In this light, a further etymological derivation of ‘lumber’ is significant. ‘Lumber’ is a later form of ‘Lombard’, the name for a bank or money-lending establishment belonging to a native of Lombardy. Thus, ‘lumber’ came to denote a pawnbroking business, and to be associated with a state of pledge or indebtedness.² The lumber room, then, was a place where things lay in wait. It was a purgatory for goods which were currently unsuitable or inappropriate, but which were too good to be thrown away – a kind of limbo.

Unsurprisingly, the lumber room is not often mentioned in interior advice books, with their focus on the curation and cultivation of the public areas of the home. The lumber room was distinctly private, a place where humans did not dwell but merely scurried in to

¹ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1869), p. 145.

² ‘lumber, n.2’, *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2016) [accessed 21st January 2016].

leave the latest bit of lumber to rest. The lumber room was incidental, not subject to the same principles of design as other rooms in the house; it was haphazard, accidentally furnished, disorderly and chaotic. As such, it appears in Victorian culture as a secret shame. *Punch's* Lady de Snookyns might have made much of such detritus; 'nothing can be more instructive than the sermons which discarded goods mutter from their melancholy lumber-room', we are told.³ The lumber room was the hoard writ small; made possible only by increasing overproduction throughout the century, it was filled with the obsolete, the broken and the worn, as Victorian householders clung to their possessions in the hope that they might one day find a use for them. But if the lumber room might be read as an expression of the shame of excess and overproduction, we might also read its repeated presence in stories of a ghostly or fantastical nature as an admission that freed from the demands of display, of exchange – even of aesthetic utility – objects still speak to us. This exploration of the lumber room as a site in which objects are removed from markets will consider a number of short stories which stage the lumber room at the centre of their action, and as such give voice to a mode of accumulation that was powerfully prohibited in the nineteenth century. These literary portrayals of sites of material excess help reveal the meanings attached to superabundant collections in the Victorian imagination.

If furnishing the lumber room was not a conscious endeavour, building one into the house could be, and we can glean some insight into what the ideal lumber room would have been like from an architectural guide. Robert Kerr, in his comprehensive guide to planning and constructing homes, *The Gentleman's House*, published in 1864, gives the following helpful definition of the lumber room;

No house of good size can be complete without the special provision of
accommodation for lumber...the Lumber-room will be a garret of any kind, with

³ [Anon.], 'Art Too Much at Home', *Punch*, 3 February 1883, p. 52.

sufficient height, windows, a fire place if possible to keep it dry, and means of access which shall be adequate for large and heavy things.⁴

That the lumber room is mentioned in Kerr's guide suggests that abundance and excess in furnishings was expected. Primarily the lumber room was for storage, and Kerr anticipates that it will come to house furniture of some description, the 'large and heavy things' he makes reference to: 'old and spare furniture, broken articles, packing-cases, and a hundred varieties of surplus matters'.⁵ Lumber should be stored in good condition – sufficient air circulation and warmth ensures that there is the chance that what goes into the room might come out again one day, in a fair state. Things do not go to the lumber room to rot. Rather, objects entering the room were stored in the eventuality that they might once more come into fashion, or at least into use. Rhoda and Agnes Garrett write in 1876 that

...people are beginning to value the old brass and steel fenders which for years past have been banished to the lumber rooms or sold for a few shillings as old metal. These are now brought from their hiding-places, furbished up, and reinstated in their ancient places of honour. The dealers buy them up whenever they can lay hands upon them, and sell them again at exorbitant prices.⁶

Indeed, the interest in antiques which burgeoned in the general population in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, meant that lumber rooms, like rural villages, were fertile hunting grounds for long-forgotten heirlooms and neglected but well-crafted specimens of furniture.⁷ Talbot Coke urges readers, in one of her domestic advice columns,

⁴ Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace* (London: John Murray, 1864), p. 275.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), p. 65.

⁷ Clarence Cook advocated that we might 'scour our own back country, where, perhaps, we may light upon a mine of unexpected richness, with owners who cannot conceal their wonder at people who are willing to pay hard cash for chairs, and tables, and sideboards, and china, that seem to

to raid their own lumber rooms, for they may be ‘treasure troves’; her own has yielded, she writes, ‘an old spinning-wheel which will just give a *cachet* to the little landing with the lattice window...a rapier or two to hang on the red paper in the hall’ and ‘an old dark cradle with its time-worn date 1601’.⁸ An 1899 advert for Maurice’s Porcelaine varnish boasts that it ‘will make any eyesore of the lumber-room the pride of the house’, demonstrating that things in the lumber room are full of potential and might yet be revived.⁹ It is hard, of course, to establish just how frequently such revivals actually occurred - perhaps invoking ‘the lumber room’ merely functioned as device in a piece of aspirational marketing, for surely not every consumer of Maurice’s varnish would have inhabited a home quite grand enough to accommodate this uninhabited space. But the advertisement, and the Garretts’ story of the ‘furbished up’ pieces certainly suggest that the ideal of capital lying dormant in the house was a powerful one, and that if one could mobilise the lumber room’s rubbish, it had the potential to become useful commodities once more. In the cultural imagination it becomes another site, like the dust heap, in which fortuitous discoveries might be made, and in newspapers tales of treasures unearthed abounded, much like the reports of miser’s hoards; the *Western Daily Press* reports in April 1888 that ‘the voluminous private correspondence between Napoleon [sic] I and his brother’ was found in a lumber room, and two years later, lumber rooms yielded furnishings designed by Sir Christopher Wren and a historic throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury, both of which made the newspapers.¹⁰

them not worth taking as a gift.’ (*The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks* (New York: Dover, 1995 (originally published New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1881)), pp. 162-63. Richard Marsh’s story ‘The Adventure of the Cabinet’ sees the rival collectors Tress and Pugh head to an out-of-the-way location where they find a priceless cabinet being used as a writing desk in a shabby old house. See *Curios: Some Strange Adventures of Two Bachelors* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007 (originally published London: John Long, 1898)).

⁸ Talbot Coke, ‘Treasure Trove’, *Hearth and Home*, 20 April 1893, pp. 696-97 (p. 696).

⁹ ‘Maurice’s Porcelaine’, *Luton Times and Advertiser*, 19 May 1899, p. 4.

¹⁰ [Anon.], ‘Interesting Discovery’, *Western Daily Press*, 3 April 1888, p. 3; [Anon.], ‘An Interesting Relic’, *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 25 November 1890, p. 2; [Anon.], ‘An Archbishop’s Throne in a Lumber Room’, *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 9 August 1890, p. 5.

The lumber room, in fact, becomes a shorthand for neglected treasure; Moncure Conway, in his 1882 *Travels in South Kensington*, speaks of the Raphaels held in that museum which have been ‘preserved by aid...of the neglect which left them hidden for a hundred years in lumber-rooms’, and which are now ‘the glorious inheritance of South Kensington’.¹¹ Similarly, an 1876 *Punch* article ridiculing current trends in millinery takes ‘Madam Fashion’ to task with the admonition that ‘it was by her command that hoops, dyes and false hair were rummaged out of the lumber-rooms of the Past to figure once again in the drawing-rooms of the Present’.¹² The lumber room in this context seems to function as a place in which things lie dormant.¹³ Things are patient in the lumber room; they do not decay, rust, or wane (if the room is properly appointed). Rather, the lumber room is a storehouse for value. It presents the hope that excess might have a use; ‘as the years creep on [the lumber room] may gradually attain to some importance. But it is obviously a question of time. No one can expect that such a chamber should become venerable to the generation under whose eyes its cumbersome stores have been accumulated’.¹⁴ So lumber sits and waits, not obsolete, but in a kind of purgatory, waiting to be re-used. As the collectors discussed in chapter four demonstrate, this does indeed happen; much of the ephemera produced in the nineteenth century is at long last being identified as legitimate objects for study, and it is thanks to the nineteenth century’s ‘lumberers of useless trash’ that we have the materials for this valuable research.

Not every home was sizeable enough to accommodate a lumber room and its existence speaks not only of a concession to fashion but also of a long-term relationship between inhabitants and house. An article in the *Worcestershire Chronicle* in 1893 bemoans that ‘a

¹¹ Moncure Conway, *Travels in South Kensington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), p. 61.

¹² [Anon.], ‘Cover Your Heads’, *Punch*, 22 January 1876, p. 12.

¹³ For a contemporary reading of dormant objects in domestic spaces see Sophie Woodward, ‘The Hidden Lives of Domestic Things: Accumulations in Cupboards, Lofts and Shelves’, in *Intimacies, Critical Consumption and Diverse Economies*, ed. by Emma Casey and Yvette Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 216-31. My iLibrary Ebook [accessed 11 March 2016].

¹⁴ [Anon.], ‘Lumber-rooms’, *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 9 December 1893, p. 2.

lumber room with any pretensions to dignity is not to be called into existence in a year or two...Tenants for such terms as three or seven years are usually content with a kind of dry dock, styled by courtesy a "box-room". This, of course, never becomes a lumber-room properly so-called'.¹⁵ The lumber room is most often, this article suggests, found in old, large, stately homes. Here, it truly has time to accumulate contents; the hoard has the chance to grow, become dusty, and accrue meaning. A lumber room filled with lumber indicates the presence of history. Transient people do not have lumber, and homes designed for brief occupancy do not have lumber rooms. Lumber rooms are established, then, in large homes, perhaps country seats; buildings big enough, and well-constructed enough, to be passed down through generations. The *Worcestershire Chronicle* gives the following description:

[T]here is a lumber-room *par excellence*, and this is to be found in that well-known type of country-house which we call "straggling." The building itself, be it house or castle, belongs to no particular order of architecture; how should it, seeing how many architects at divers times have had a hand in it? It is a house of many patches, which means that there was a substantial erection to begin upon. One or more "wings" is an enviable appendage. A tower is a very possible addition, and "annexes" confront us in the most unexpected situations. But there is pretty certain to be comfort in one of these old dwellings, and there is quite certain to be a lumber-room. Along some distant and little-frequented corridor, through intersecting passages - whose varying levels demand caution on the part of the explorer - up or down a remote staircase, as the case may be, a solid-looking door presently bars our passage; the rusty key grates in the lock, and we enter the dusty twilight of the chamber of memories.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The most suitable setting for a lumber room, according to the anonymous author of this passage, is a house already full of memories and varied histories, registered materially in its architecture. The author finds 'comfort' in such a dwelling, and the lumber room is tucked away in its long, winding passages and concealed behind a heavy door. This piece of imaginative commentary calls to mind Gaston Bachelard's claim that the house is a psychic space, a repository for our dreams and memories. Bachelard writes that 'thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated'.¹⁷ These underused or hidden recesses in the architectural space of the building come to function both as metaphorical spaces for the unconscious and real sites which provoke and store our memories. The higgledy-piggledy construction of the 'house or castle' that the *Worcestershire Chronicle* author describes is a mirror for our memory and its patchwork, material quality, and the lumber room is the most obscure part of that psychic space.

In Victorian fiction, the lumber room is usually a sequestered space, tucked away in a dark recess of the house. The lumber room of H. C. Davidson's illustrated children's story *King Diddle* is found in a 'quiet old country house, so far away from the nearest town that they seldom saw a visitor'.¹⁸ The house is 'a strange old place' ripe for mystery, 'full of long narrow passages and steep staircases twisting about like corkscrews, dark rooms with oak ceilings and big cupboards, windows with diamond panes, curious furniture, straight-backed chairs, and grim pictures that watched every movement'.¹⁹ Similarly, the home of Fa Diesis, the collector in Vernon Lee's story 'Winthrop's Adventure', is a 'queer old place, full of ups and downs and twistings and turnings', the lumber room being located through

¹⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 8

¹⁸ H. C. Davidson, *King Diddle* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1887), pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Davidson, p. 6.

‘a narrow and wriggling corridor somewhere in the heart of the building’.²⁰ These rarely-inhabited spaces correspond to the unconscious mind’s repressed anxieties and desires. We might understand the lumber room’s position in literature, therefore, as a space in which cultural fears or concerns can come to the fore.

If the homes where lumber rooms exist are foreboding, then the rooms themselves are even more so, particularly at night, which often provides the setting for fictional visits to that place. A story by John Oxenford which appeared in *All the Year Round* in 1862, ‘His Umbrella’, tells of a man’s attempt to rid himself of a haunted gingham umbrella he inadvertently takes from a ghost on 29th February. In one of his efforts he leaves the umbrella in the lumber room above his bedroom, and steals into the room at night.

Lumber, insignificant by day, is ghastly at night, when illuminated by a single candle, and seen by a single spectator. The common household articles, cast aside as unavailable for immediate use, and huddled together in a fashion completely at variance with their original purpose, have a corpse-like appearance, and the shadows they cast are portentous.²¹

Similarly in *King Diddle*, two children, having formulated an idea to visit the lumber room whilst in the daylight, find the execution of their plan somewhat more difficult in the dead of night;

The first glimpse of the room showed the children a medley of chairs, beds, boxes, tables, and sofas, all laid aside as useless. It was quite a hospital for crippled furniture, though nothing ever got well there. No chair had more than three legs; the sofas had

²⁰ Lee, p. 8.

²¹ John Oxenford, ‘His Umbrella’, *All the Year Round*, 8, 1862 Christmas (4 December 1862), pp. 585-90 (p. 588).

broken their backs; a statue had lost its head; and a number of cracked jugs stood in a doleful row, like Greenwich pensioners on parade. All these wretched objects must have been there for years, for they were thickly coated with dust and almost hidden by a lacework of cobwebs. The moonlight, struggling through the window, wove all manner of curious patterns upon the floor; but sometimes there came a moment's darkness, and then it was not such a cheerful place as they children had expected to find.²²

Tucked into the heart of vast gothic mansions, the lumber room is teeming with potent things. Items in there, although cast aside as broken or useless, still hum with an other-worldly potential, despite their being discarded. They are obstinate in their materiality; unwanted, they remain, gathering dust and, in both rooms, casting 'portentous' shadows across the floor. These items, which were once familiar in the house, are uncanny; disturbingly different because, Oxenford's narrator suggests, they have been thrust together in a manner which pays no heed to their use value or relation to each other. In this sense, the lumber room shares some similarities with the collection, as both are spaces in which objects' previous meanings are superseded. But the lumber room's things resist human regulation; in each of the passages above, the anthropomorphised objects take on new (if perhaps weak) agency as they 'huddle' together, or stand 'like Greenwich pensioners on parade', 'corpse-like' and 'crippled'. Deborah Cohen has suggested that ghost stories which focussed on the potential agency of old things hinted at the terrifying nightmare that stuff was not really under human control; 'the haunted house', she says, 'laid bare the dark side of the home decoration manual.'²³ However much one might try to corral things in the parlour, once in the lumber room, infinite possibilities seem to suggest themselves. A peripheral room, in a forgotten garret or tucked away in an infrequently

²² Davidson, pp. 18-19.

²³ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 166.

accessed centre of a typically sprawling and gothic house, the lumber room functions as a kind of unconscious for the Victorian home. These stories demonstrate how such spaces can act as the backdrop for our terror, for the expression of what usually remains unsaid.

The house in Mrs Molesworth's short story, 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady', is an exception to the architectural standard, however – this lumber room resides in a resolutely quotidian home.²⁴ Following the well established tropes of the ghost story, Lady Farquhar is persuaded to tell the story of her encounter with a ghost, many years after the event, as she and her friend sit, their 'chairs drawn close to the fire', at Christmas time.²⁵ To establish early on the veracity of her tale, we learn that Lady Farquhar is 'far too sensible and healthy and vigorous' to be 'the victim of delusion of any kind', and she declares that 'my mind was perfectly free from prepossession or association in connection with the place we were living in, or the people who had lived there before us.'²⁶ The house, Ballyreina, where the young Lady Farquhar (Margaret) and her family spend a winter convalescing is painted as a similarly blank canvas, not particularly ripe for imaginative fancy;

I had no sort of fancy about the house — that it was haunted, or anything of that kind; and indeed I never heard that it *was* thought to be haunted. It did not look like it; it was just a moderate-sized, somewhat old-fashioned country, or rather sea-side, house, furnished, with the exception of one room, in an ordinary enough modern style.²⁷

The exception is, of course, the lumber room, which is 'crowded with musty old furniture, packed closely together, and all of a fashion many, many years older than that of the

²⁴ Published as part of the collection *Four Ghost Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888).

²⁵ Molesworth, p. 6.

²⁶ Molesworth, pp. 5, 8.

²⁷ Molesworth, pp. 8-9.

contents of the rest of the house'.²⁸ The room is kept locked (as all lumber rooms must be; in Davidson's and Munro's stories the adventures can only begin once the keys have been illicitly obtained) but Margaret and her sister go in, to find that

There were two or three old-fashioned cabinets or bureaux; there was a regular four-post bedstead, with the gloomy curtains still hanging round it; and ever so many spider-legged chairs and rickety tables; and I rather think in one corner there was a spinet. But there was nothing particularly curious or attractive, and we never thought of meddling with the things or 'poking about,' as girls sometimes do....²⁹

Although the things themselves seem to offer little in the way of ghostly potential, the space is distinctly out-of-bounds, and the forays into the lumber room have an illicit feel. Before long, Margaret witnesses a figure, draped in 'one of those funny little old-fashioned black shawls', walk down the corridor, up to the door of the lumber room, and straight through the locked door, without opening it.³⁰ Not entertaining the thought that she may have seen a ghost, she takes her sister Helen and turns the lumber room upside down, looking for the hiding place of the person she has seen, but to no avail. Later, the ghost approaches her again, and she sees it is an old woman, who looks at her, 'wistful and beseeching'.³¹ Margaret is terrified, and the family leave Ballyreina shortly after this episode, but by chance, later learn the identity of the ghostly woman from an elderly visitor, Mrs Gordon. She tells them that Ballyreina had once been owned by the Fitzgeralds, a prosperous family who suffered misfortunes, and were eventually forced to let their home on a long lease and leave for the Continent, where they spent their time

²⁸ Molesworth, p. 9.

²⁹ Molesworth, pp. 9-10.

³⁰ Molesworth, p. 15.

³¹ Molesworth, p. 29.

barefoot, 'wandering about from place to place'.³² The lumber room had been set aside by the Fitzgeralds 'to leave some of their poor old treasures in — relics too cumbersome to be carried about with them in their strange wanderings, but too precious, evidently, to be parted with.'³³

This lumber room is imbricated with a familiar Victorian story of financial ruin, and it demonstrates the centrality of domestic life to personality which had come to be established by the end of the nineteenth century; 'if ever a heart was buried in a house', says Mrs Gordon, 'it was that of poor old Miss Fitzgerald'.³⁴ The lumber room, locus of the ghostly apparitions, is that heart, and it formed the emotional centre of Ballyreina, harbouring not valuable jewels or trading papers, but emotionally charged mementoes:

We, of course, never could know what may not have been hidden away in some of the queer old bureaux I told you of. Family papers of importance, perhaps; possibly some ancient love-letters, forgotten in the confusion of their leave-taking; a lock of hair, or a withered flower, perhaps, that she, my poor old lady, would fain have clasped in her hand when dying, or have had buried with her. Ah, yes; there must be many a pitiful old story that is never told.³⁵

This lumber room, its contents 'of a fashion many, many years older than that of the contents of the rest of the house', conceals the shame of financial ruin. Embedded in the frames of Lady Farquhar's retelling as it is within the house, the lumber room functions as a hiding place. It is through the haunting of this room that the story of its occupants comes to be told, but Molesworth's tale poses the question of what becomes of our things once they are detached from their stories. The imagined keepsakes inside the bureaux that Lady

³² Molesworth, p. 38.

³³ Molesworth, p. 40.

³⁴ Molesworth, p. 39.

³⁵ Molesworth, pp. 40-41.

Farquhar speculates are so precious, become nothing once the Fitzgeralds die; they are left behind materially, of course, but to what end? The inaccessibility of the keepsakes means that their stories are 'never told', and this hints at the importance of what the lumber room keeps indefinitely - not the exchange value of things, but their individual histories.

This quality of the lumber room is celebrated by the *Worcestershire Chronicle's* anonymously authored piece of imaginative commentary.

The lumber-room...has not one ghost, but many... they are real, these spirits...and are in truth only in temporary possession on our introduction. We sit for a moment on a great chest, worm-eaten and antique...[h]ad this roomy receptacle a spring-lock, and did happy children ever find a hiding-place within its ample walls? Here is a large oaken table, substantial even in decay, and which must have been a sacred altar of hospitality centuries ago. Retainers have feasted at it "below the salt," and offenders trembled before the justice presiding at its head. There stands...the broken-down chair of state from which probably the worshipful owner dispensed ready justice among the villagers. Can we look at this rusty suit of chain armour, disjointed and collapsed, without in imagination amending and refurbishing it? And then, its tenant; he must have been a "proper" man - there were such men in those days! But, at all events, he lives for the moment for and with us, as have those other speaking shades of the lumber-room. Nay, as we slowly turn away, we cannot yet dispossess ourselves of the thick-coming fancies that have besieged us. They haunt us till we return to the society of the living and seek to forget that time only is wanted to make us just such shadows to our descendants.³⁶

³⁶ 'Lumber-rooms', *Worcestershire Chronicle*, p. 2.

Things discarded here are ripe for imaginative play. Their ability to inspire a speculative engagement with the lives of their previous owners and users aligns them with relics, as they connect the author with the people and places from which they came – it is ‘time only’ that separates the author from their historical counterparts, the previous human users of the objects. The lumber room is thus full of ghosts, of ‘speaking shades’ which emanate from auratic objects. Nineteenth-century fictions of the lumber room suggest that the desire for those things to speak comes partly from human interlocutors, but partly also from things themselves.

A series of stories which appeared in the periodical *Bow Bells* throughout 1865 explicitly positions the lumber room’s objects as both saturated with, and actors in, history. ‘Voices from the Lumber-Room’, by Eliza Winstanley, appeared over six months and included six tales, ‘The Fan’s Story’, ‘The Old Mirror’s Narrative’, ‘The Tale Told by the Old Clock’, ‘The Piano’s Disclosures’, ‘The Old Armchair’s Gossiping’ and ‘What the Cradle Had to Tell’. The lumber room, ‘a dreary apartment, filled with a confused mass of different things, and thickly carpeted and hung with dust and cobwebs’ is staged as a meeting place for these objects, who agree to tell each other their stories, ‘[a]s we have all of us seen a great deal of the world – I mean of the people in it’.³⁷ The plots of Winstanley’s moral stories for families move far from the lumber room – it merely provides the setting for the meeting of these incongruous things³⁸ – but the narrative device plays into the idea that our things are storehouses for the stories of our lives, loves, and emotions and, if activated by the right conditions, might be able to tell these stories. The fan opens its narrative by stating that ‘[a]lthough I am a very insignificant article, it has been my lot to see much of the human species...[t]heir vanities and their disappointments, their loves and their jealousies, their devotion and their falsehood, their generosity and their dishonesty, their

³⁷ Eliza Winstanley, ‘The Fan’s Story’, *Bow Bells*, 2:46 (14 June 1865), 477-80 (p. 477).

³⁸ For long passages the stories abandon the conceit of the object-narrator entirely, but always return to it at the close.

heartburnings and their joys, their struggles and their sorrows, have all been laid open before me',³⁹ suggesting how objects perform central, silent roles in our human lives. The tales of the fan and its fellow objects describe their movement through various human practices and contexts, in which they are acted upon and act in different ways – commodity, gift, loan, weapon, signal, love token, trifle, conduit. We might consider Winstanley's stories 'it-narratives', which by the nineteenth century were generally morally didactic and aimed at a juvenile audience.⁴⁰ These narratives of circulation portray objects at the whim of humans – the fan, at the close of its story, tells how it 'fell into another's hands, which brought me into this country, deprived me of my valuable adornments, knocked me about considerably, and then threw me into a rubbish drawer, and utterly forgot me.'⁴¹ But in the lumber room, freed from their relation to subjects, objects can speak, and Winstanley often has the conference of things make moral pronouncements upon the human heroes and antagonists of each others' tales, a dark suggestion that despite our ability to bend them to our will, they might not be fully under our control.

The story of *King Diddle*, on the other hand, seems to glory in its objects' lack of meaning. Hugh Coleman Davidson uses the lumber room, as he uses the genre of children's fiction, as a place where the uses, values, and interchange between things and bodies can be imaginatively explored.⁴² The lumber room provides the setting for fantastical goings-on in his surreal story. Hugh and Amy, the flaxen haired protagonists of the tale, orphans who live with their grandparents, plot to fulfil their 'pet dream', and enter a garret used as a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Lynn Festa, 'The Moral Ends of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Object Narratives', in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), pp. 309-28.

⁴¹ Eliza Winstanley, 'Continuation of The Fan's Story', *Bow Bells*, 2:49 (5 July 1865), 549-52 (p. 552).

⁴² Davidson authored several books in the late nineteenth century and had a particular interest in the domestic; he edited *The Book of the Home* in 1905, an 'encyclopaedia of all matters relating to the house and household management', which sadly contains no reference to lumber rooms or their appropriate appointment (London: Gresham, 1905).

lumber room which their Grandfather had told them was 'full of rats and rubbish'.⁴³ Once there, they meet a variety of strange, pompous, argumentative creatures, led by Diddle, a tiny man who lives inside a violin. This lumber room is a topsy-turvy place in which the usual rules of our material world do not apply. The properties of things are confused here; moonlight becomes a 'lake of crystal' in which the adventurers swim, the lumber room's dust its banks, 'as hard as iron'.⁴⁴ Diddle and his friend Jocko continually have the status of objecthood conferred upon their bodies: Diddle uses his head as a duster; Jocko polishes his shoes with his nose; he removes a toe so that he might be inflated, and Amy remarks to him '[w]hat a useful body yours is...you might tie your tail round your waist and hang bags from it'.⁴⁵ Another inhabitant of the room is 'cracked' so that water runs through him and his thirst is never quenched. Even the psyche has a material quality: Jocko attempts to aid his recall of a forgotten tune by standing on his head, declaring 'if you can't find it in your head, it must be somewhere in your body; and if you'll just stand on your head for a time, it must tumble back'.⁴⁶ Meanwhile a piano 'laughs' at Amy with 'great yellow teeth', and a concertina 'nods' at the children 'just as if it were alive'.⁴⁷ A large worm-like creature with 'a very savage appearance' is cut open, and found to be 'filled with newspapers and wires',⁴⁸ but beneath these are trapdoors, containing more tiny, human-like figures. The confusion which reigns in this lumber room between things and bodies is many-layered and entirely incoherent. The things are freed from normal use, commodification and display, and the children access both their animate sides, and the human-like presences which live within them. These presences are revealed to be variously malevolent, maudlin, jocose and kindly – Hugh and Amy are as often scared by them as delighted. There are no lessons to be learned in this inconsistent world, either, and the children merely creep downstairs again at the break of day, '[t]ired with all the wonderful things they had seen

⁴³ Davidson, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Davidson, p. 62.

⁴⁵ Davidson, p. 47.

⁴⁶ Davidson, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁷ Davidson, pp. 56, 34.

⁴⁸ Davidson, p. 75.

and done'.⁴⁹ Children and things, bodies both animate and inanimate, seem to revel in this lack of moral, lesson or meaning. Davidson's portrayal of the tricky and disorienting object world of the lumber room, where matter disobeys the usual rules by which we understand it, seems to acknowledge the endless and nebulous polysemy of objects which are not corralled by the human hand.

This reading might be extended to H. H. Munro's 1914 story, 'The Lumber Room', in which the room also acts as an escape from arbitrary authority.⁵⁰ In this short tale, young Nicholas, having put a frog into his breakfast, is excluded from an impromptu trip to the seaside, invented as his punishment, and chooses this moment to 'put into execution a plan of action that had long germinated in his brain', to explore the 'mysteries of the lumber-room'.⁵¹ His Aunt, intent on preventing his entering the walled gooseberry garden, fails to notice that he steals the key and enters the room. What Nicholas finds is a 'storehouse of unimagined treasures', full of 'wonderful things for the eye to feast on'.⁵² The gooseberry garden is 'a mere material pleasure' in comparison, for in the lumber room, Nicholas can discover not only the things themselves, but their potency.

First and foremost there was a piece of framed tapestry that was evidently meant to be a fire-screen. To Nicholas it was a living, breathing story; he sat down on a roll of Indian hangings, glowing in wonderful colours beneath a layer of dust, and took in all the details of the tapestry picture...[he] sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene...⁵³

⁴⁹ Davidson, p. 99.

⁵⁰ Hector Hugo Munro, *Beasts and Super-beasts* (London: John Lane, 1914).

⁵¹ Munro, p. 278.

⁵² Munro, p. 279

⁵³ Munro, pp. 279-80.

Nicholas invents possible outcomes for the scene of the hunter and the stag in the tapestry, and when his imagination is exhausted by that, he finds other objects with which to play that have interest beyond their mere function; 'quaint twisted candlesticks in the shape of snakes, and a teapot fashioned like a china duck, out of whose open beak the tea was supposed to come. How dull and shapeless the nursery teapot seemed in comparison!'⁵⁴ He finds a book of exotic birds, and just 'as he was admiring the colouring of the mandarin duck and assigning a life-history to it', a call from his Aunt, who is searching for him in the walled garden, puts an end to his adventure.⁵⁵ The knick-knacks that Nicholas discovers are just the kind of trumpery and gimcracks that design reformers railed against in the living rooms and parlours of the nation, yet in the lumber room their status as new, ahistorical, manufactures gives way to the sense of wonder that Nicholas experiences as he encounters them. They lead him on an imaginative, speculative trail. Brian Gibson, examining how Munro presents childhood, has suggested that the room provides an alternative to the walled garden, typically associated with childhood in this period and attendant with ideas about surveillance and guardianship; 'the adult-ordained usefulness of objects and lessons, for indoctrination and discipline, is rejected as Nicholas imagines stories for the objects'.⁵⁶ Not only, however, does the lumber room offer a sanctuary for Nicholas, but for objects, too. Nicholas' exile is occasioned by an incident of matter out of place; 'the sin of taking a frog from the garden and putting it into a bowl of wholesome bread-and-milk', but the lumber room, in which everything is matter out of place, free from use-value, allows things to speak.⁵⁷

In these various stories, the lumber room functions as a space in which encounters with things can happen which are outside of the usual power relationships in which humans

⁵⁴ Munro, p. 280.

⁵⁵ Munro, p. 281.

⁵⁶ Brian Gibson, 'Murdering Adulthood: From Child Killers to Boy Soldiers in Saki's Fiction', in *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time*, ed. by Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) pp. 208-23 (pp. 216-17).

⁵⁷ Munro, p. 274.

are appointed curator, user, viewer, shopper, and the object remains always a potential 'thing'. The lumber room might be considered as a space contiguous with the collection, given Walter Benjamin's suggestion that collectors harbour the desire to experience 'a relationship to objects which does not emphasise their functional, utilitarian value'.⁵⁸ Freeing objects, at least temporarily, from function, the lumber room allows the apprehension of other constituents of their multivocality. Bill Brown has written that it is often only when things are broken (that is to say, refuse to fulfil their designated use-value) that we really confront them as 'things', in all the stubborn materiality that they entail.⁵⁹ We might understand the lumber room, then, as a place in which, in Brown's words, we stop looking *through* objects, and *at* things.⁶⁰ It is lumber's status as excess which makes it ideal for this exercise; Brown writes that we might conceive of 'thingness' as 'what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects — their force as a sensuous or as a metaphysical presence'.⁶¹ Tales of the lumber room bring out the thingness of things – they approach objects as haunted relics, as carriers of numinous properties.

The final ghostly lumber tale, Vernon Lee's 'A Culture Ghost: or, Winthrop's Adventure', features two lumber rooms.⁶² Julian Winthrop is staying at a friend's villa in Florence, when a piece of music one of their party plays on the piano, 'singularly graceful and delicate',⁶³ stirs him into a violent reaction. His host says that she discovered the air 'among a piece of rubbish in my father-in-law's lumber room...quite a treasure, as good as a wrought-iron ornament found among a heap of old rusty nails, or a piece of Gubbio

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 62.

⁵⁹ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), 1-22 (p. 4).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Brown, 'Thing Theory', p. 5.

⁶² Vernon Lee, 'Culture-Ghost: or, Winthrop's Adventure', *Fraser's Magazine*, 613 (January 1881), 1-29.

⁶³ Lee, p. 2.

majolica found among cracked coffee cups'.⁶⁴ Winthrop tells the story of how he first heard it played by an apparition in the ghostly Villa Negri. He had come to be staying in the Villa after having been enchanted by a 'strange and striking' portrait he had seen in a house belonging to a collector friend of his, Fa Diesis.⁶⁵ The portrait resides in this 'small, bleak, whitewashed lumber-room, peopled with broken book-shelves, crazy music desks, and unsteady chairs and tables' and despite its 'cracked surface' and 'goodly layer of dust', is 'uncommonly good'.⁶⁶ Winthrop feels haunted by the image of the man in the portrait, and learns that he was named Ferdinando Rinaldi, and was a great singer in the eighteenth century, but that he came to a bloody end when he was murdered on the steps of the Villa Negri. Developing an obsession with Rinaldi's story, Winthrop finds the now-dilapidated villa, and arranges to spend the night there, despite the warning of its neighbours, who protest that 'there are evil things in that house.'⁶⁷ It is here that he has an encounter with the ghostly Rinaldi, who plays the piece of music that Winthrop is later violently moved by, before terrifying Winthrop with a 'long, shrill, quivering cry'.⁶⁸ The encounter causes Winthrop to confront the reality of his own mortal existence: as he rushes out into the sunlight he is struck, 'more vividly than ever before, [by] how terrible it must be to be cut off for ever from all this, to lie, blind and deaf and motionless mouldering underground.'⁶⁹ The two lumber rooms of the story function as resting sites for enchanted things – the sheet music and the portrait – which reveal their latent power only when 'activated' by a human interlocutor; the music must be heard, the portrait, seen. Though the action of the tale moves away from these enchanted spaces, the lumber rooms are points of origin for the haunted objects, indicative of the many animate things which might lie dormant within. As James Bunn writes '[b]ecause objects may be given different turns as

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Lee, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Lee, pp. 8, 9.

⁶⁷ Lee, p. 22.

⁶⁸ Lee, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Lee, p. 27.

determined by their contexts, they are either useful or wasteful; in waiting they are potential'.⁷⁰ Lee's tale exploits this imaginative potency of waiting lumber.

Kristin Mahoney has observed how Lee was influenced by economic theory at the end of the decade, and how her supernatural fiction 'models a method of relating to objects that is at once more ethical and more pleasurable than those object relations, such as collecting, that involve ignoring historical contexts'.⁷¹ In her exploration of 'Winthrop's Adventure', Mahoney notes how Winthrop's quest to establish the history of the portrait and make some meaningful connection with its past is contrasted by Fa Diesis's collecting, in which not only are the histories of items ignored, but their use also, their relationship reduced to one of abstracted ownership. Although Fa Diesis collects the materials of music, including scores, instruments, manuscripts, and the personal items of singers, musicians and composers, including their autographs, portraits, and even a pickled lung, he has no interest in music whatsoever.

He cared for nothing in the wide world save his collections; he had cut down tree after tree, he had sold field after field and farm after farm; he had sold his furniture, his tapestries, his plate, his family papers, his own clothes. He would have taken the tiles off his roof and the glass out of his windows to buy some score of the sixteenth century, some illuminated mass book or some Cremonese fiddle. For music itself I firmly believe he cared not a jot, and regarded it as useful only inasmuch as it had produced the objects of his passion, the things which he could spend all of his life in dusting, labelling, counting, and cataloguing, for not a chord,

⁷⁰ James H. Bunn, 'The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism', *New Literary History*, 11:2 (1980), 303-21 (p. 313).

⁷¹ Kristin Mahoney, 'Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption', *Criticism*, 48:1 (2006), 39-67 (p. 45).

not a note was ever heard in his house, and he would have died rather than spend a soldino on going to the opera.⁷²

Lee's portrayal of Fa Diesis applies many of the criticisms which, by the late nineteenth century, had become commonplace in depictions of collectors. Fa Diesis displays total detachment from his objects' use and aesthetic values, attending to them only through the 'dusting, labelling, counting and cataloguing' which is necessitated by the collection. His complete absorption in collecting does not entail aesthetic appreciation, but dominion-building. It is Winthrop's fantasy that the subjugated things should speak again. He fancies that

...as soon as the master had drawn his bolts and gone off to bed, all this slumbering music would awake, that the pictures of dead musicians would slip out of their frames...the kettledrums and tamtams would strike up, the organ tubes would suddenly be filled with sound, the old gilded harpsichords would jingle like fury, the old chapel-master yonder, in his peruke and furred robe, would beat time on his picture frame, and the whole motley company set to dancing... ⁷³

This fantasy of things-as-actors never comes to pass, of course, but for Mahoney, Winthrop's encounter with the ghostly Rinaldi is its double. In the apparition, the portrait has 'come alive'; he even speaks, letting out a song that, at first, 'seemed to steep the soul in enervating bliss'.⁷⁴ In Lee's story, the collection is a place in which objects experience a kind of semantic annihilation, but the lumber room lets them speak again; it is an enabling site for acts of thing-articulation. It is from the lumber room that the music comes which occasions the very telling of the story, and it is in the lumber room of Fa Diesis that

⁷² Lee, p. 7.

⁷³ Lee, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁴ Lee, pp. 25-26.

Winthrop is originally enchanted with the painting. The room thus acts a site for the exploration of what is hidden, beyond display – that which lies mute in objects. It is the lumber's quality of superfluity which enables this, its possession of something which exceeds any commercial or didactic objective to which it has been put in service in the past. In being freed from their relations to subjects, objects find their thing-ness.

The lumber room therefore constitutes a space apart in nineteenth-century culture. Victorian authors used it as a site in which to explore their century's rapidly changing relationships with objects and how they might speak to us outside of the contexts of display and exchange. In the stories discussed here, things in the lumber room betray, confound, and haunt humans, suggesting that they have meanings which eclipse our understanding of them as tools, commodities or aesthetic objects. The lumber room appears in fiction as a dangerous site, for to confront the lumber room is also to confront unruly excess, to '[reopen] bounded meaning to the kind of chaos that the institutions of ritual were built to contain.'⁷⁵ The texts which consider lumber rooms demonstrate that things have lives beyond use. They therefore act, not as critiques of fashion, novelty or capitalist consumption, but as utterances of a cultural world in which objects mean outside of these systems as well as within them. The invocation of the lumber room in Victorian commentary on the condition of museums matters, because it reveals a fear that institutions might not have a hold on their objects' meanings and narratives.

If collecting is 'the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences',⁷⁶ then the lumber room is an anti-collection, an accidental accrual of discarded items, neglected and untheorised. The lumber room's

⁷⁵ Greg Kennedy, *An Ontology of Trash: The Disposable and its Problematic Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 12.

⁷⁶ Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 67.

irrationality is what makes it so pertinent to this study of forms of accumulation which did not conform to the tenets of the useful museum. Collecting practices which failed to select and discriminate properly, which gathered too much, could slip in the Victorian imagination into hoard, bric-a-brac or lumber, material practices which seemed to strip objects of their meanings. Susan Stewart suggests that the presence of a series is what distinguishes the collection from pure accumulation,⁷⁷ but it is worth thinking about how such distinctions are put to work mostly to protect the means of knowledge production from being wrested from those in power. Deeming particular modes of accumulation 'irrational' frees us from the obligation to consider their worth as valid epistemological exercises. If collecting can be said to be one of the primary means by which the nineteenth century understood the world, then to admit bric-a-brac or hoard the status of 'collecting' would have been to open up the institutions of meaning-making to the destabilising claims of the outsider. This is why the conditions and mechanisms through which this material mode of producing cultural meanings could be conducted had to be carefully delineated in the Victorian era of democratised collecting. Where useful collecting put objects to work in the service of human narratives, the modes of material excess discussed in the last three chapters each allude in some way to what is excessive in objects themselves. These accumulations call attention to the ways in which objects transcend the uses they are put to by humans. Perhaps, then, the collection that 'teeters between mastery and madness' is worth taking seriously.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 153-55.

⁷⁸ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, 'Introduction', *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 1-6 (p. 6).

Conclusion

When Henry Cuming died in 1902, his obituary appeared in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, where he had published nearly two hundred articles over the last 58 years.¹ The anonymous author of the tribute writes about Henry's 'inheritance' of the collecting habit from his father Richard, his lifelong pursuit of the hobby, and his published work, as well as the community of antiquarians of which he formed an important part. Cuming's identity as a collector is described in terms of his success at emulating museum modes of display; his home is described as 'a private museum, where he stored the choicest specimens', 'carefully arranged, classified, and exhaustively labelled, thus forming a thoroughly educational series to the student of bygone times.' The author applauds him for the generous spirit which made his collections socially useful, writing that 'he freely imparted information and the kindest assistance to those who were attracted to him by his world-wide reputation, and he was eminently qualified to teach the subjects which he had made so entirely his own.' The author is relieved to note that '[t]he collection he had formed will not be dispersed', informing their readers of the provision for the opening of a public museum which appeared in Henry's will. Thus, it seemed at the time of Henry's death that the future of the collection as a site of moral and educational improvement was assured.

Henry's obituary does not mention the vast and chaotic archive of common theatre bills that he compiled, nor the many relics of royal and prestigious persons in his possession which were considered in chapter two of this thesis. Obviously, it does not detail his fondness for exchanging botanical specimens in heartfelt letters to a sweetheart, Rosaline Oliver, with whom he was reunited in old age, nor his tendency to keep every piece of

¹ [Anon.], 'Henry Syer Cuming', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 8 (new series) (1902), 239-40.

correspondence which he received, down to a mundane request from a local estate owner that nearby residents allow their taps to drip to prevent water pipes from freezing in the winter.² Nor, of course, does it discuss his unpublished poetical compositions which espoused the pleasures to be had in attending the local jumble sale ('such bargains you will find!') and romanticised the domestic furnishings of 'the good old days'.³ I do not, of course, suggest that these things ought to have appeared in Henry's obituary. But I do argue that they represent a spectrum of material practices in which he was participating, and of which his collecting was only one. Henry's obituary thus crudely demonstrates how texts can make material practices mean, as the figure it describes is the methodical, organised, and socially productive keeper of an idealised collection.

This thesis has looked to nineteenth-century print culture to identify the imagined boundaries of idealised collecting and in subjecting those boundaries to a cultural analysis it has taken in a range of acquisitive and accumulative behaviours and their representations. It has thus considered an array of voices stimulated by collecting and museum culture: legislative, prescriptive, celebratory, cautious, and satirical. There is no 'one voice' of the latter nineteenth century, but this research has shown how print culture, including journalism, periodical fiction, and canonical literature, helped to mould the meanings of collecting as collecting itself attempted to determine the meanings of things. One of the ways this was achieved, this thesis has argued, was the depiction of acquisitive practices which deviated from museum modes as aberrant, thus working to uphold the ideal of the socially useful museum.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, collecting appears in literature not as a culturally sanctioned means of negotiating the world but as a signal for a troubling

² Manuscript letters between Henry and Rosaline, and the notice from the legal firm Meynell and Pemberton, can be found in Southwark Local History Library, London, Box A270/4.

³ Henry's manuscript compositions are also held at Southwark Local History Library, Box A270/4.

materialism, a marker of the slippage of morals that takes place when we elide thingly bodies with human bodies. Through examining these representations this thesis has suggested that the closeness between objects and bodies had a potent generative power in Victorian culture which injunctions against the collector attempted to subdue. It therefore identifies a 'humanist sympathy' in both popular and antiquarian material practices and writings that finds its index in the power of relics, or what Susan Pearce has called 'the real object in all its individual humanity'.⁴ This humanism is lost or rewritten in many literary depictions of collectors but finds abstruse form in the fiction of Henry James, and my reading of James in conjunction with relic culture therefore contributes to recent reappraisals of the ethical imperatives of Victorian collecting practices.⁵ Part one also suggests that the study of embodied knowledge has an important role in our understanding of how the past is conceived of and understood.

The second part of this thesis considered collecting's diffuse manifestations and how Victorian culture dealt with the intersections of museum culture and abundance in a range of textual and material forms. It explored three sites of unintelligible excess and showed how these were connected to wider discourses about how meaning could be derived and made through the material world. It identified the lumber room as both a physical and psychic site in the Victorian cultural imaginary, opening up new avenues of inquiry for research into the operations of affect, materiality, and domesticity, both historically and in contemporary culture. The recognition of a corpus of 'lumber fictions' is suggestive of how

⁴ Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 209.

⁵ The recent work of Kristin Mahoney and Victoria Mills is notable in this regard; see Mahoney, 'Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption', *Criticism*, 48:1 (2006), 39-67 and 'Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Collecting in The Connoisseur: An Illustrated Magazine for Collectors, 1901-1914', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 45.2 (Summer 2012), 175-199, and Mills, "A Long, Sunny Harvest of Taste and Curiosity": Collecting, Aesthetics and the Female Body in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*', *Women's History Review*, 18:4 (2009), 669-86, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612020903112463>> and 'Books in my Hands – Books in my Heart – Books in my Brain': Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature" in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 130-52.

that space operated in the nineteenth-century imagination and also gestures toward the importance of a better understanding of how we understand our human role of stewardship of the object world. The lumber room's objects, which straddle the categories of possession and rubbish, loved and unloved, suggest that we ought to consider not only how people's meanings and affects adhere to things, but also why things adhere to people – why are there some things that resist trashing? That Victorian fiction so often positions these uncommodified objects as portals into polysemantic worlds of imagination suggests that the reasons 'why dormant things matter' deserve exploring with more subtlety.⁶

As this thesis has considered the many ways that Victorian people and texts used and thought about materiality, it has become clear that the polysemy of objects demands critical approaches which can accommodate the complexities of the web of relationships and systems in which they are implicated. This thesis began by declaring its intention to resist thinking about objects as commodities or exhibits, initiated by the 'utter confusion which reigned unchecked and uncared for' in the Walworth Emporium.⁷ It ends with the Victorian lumber room, a space both materially real and oneirically potent in which objects are neither singled out for display nor part of a market. These liminal sites of extreme neglect have served as points from which we might think through Victorian relationships with objects without centring their commodity or exhibited status. As such, whilst this thesis has made use of some of Marx's ideas about the nature of the commodity form, it rejects the notion that the theory of commodity fetishism can sufficiently account for the many dimensions of human relationships to things, both in the nineteenth century and beyond. Rather, the course of this research has suggested that new materialism's focus on questions of active, agential and affective matter might be able to better

⁶ Sophie Woodward, 'The Hidden Lives of Domestic Things: Accumulations in Cupboards, Lofts and Shelves', in *Intimacies, Critical Consumption and Diverse Economies*, ed. by Emma Casey and Yvette Taylor (Basingstoke: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 216-31. My iLibrary Ebook [accessed 11 March 2016], p. 217.

⁷ Henry Syer Cuming, 'Our Old Curiosity Shop', [n.d.] London, Southwark Local History Library, MS TN05693.

accommodate the reciprocal relationships between human bodies and material objects that Victorian fiction frequently wrestles with. For example, where a Marxist critique sees the hoarder as merely a deranged capitalist, new materialism understands objects' forms as an important component of this particular manifestation of human-object relations; Jane Bennett suggests that hoarders might be 'differently abled bodies that might have special sensory access to the call of things.'⁸ Objects in Victorian culture were not just three-dimensional manifestations of exchange-value, and such an approach accommodates the 'resilient, intense and intimate bond[s] with non-human bodies' which are exhibited throughout collecting culture.⁹

Undeniably, however, what has simultaneously emerged from this research is the need to subject the theory of collecting to a class-based analysis. Both lines of enquiry of this thesis have raised this issue: part one through its examination of the power structures underlying the prohibition of touch in museum settings, and part two through attending to the hoarder's prodigious accumulation of low-value objects. In both instances, the representation of collectors as aberrant – getting too close to things and collecting too many – highlights that collecting which rejects normative systems of value must be called irrational by the dominant museal culture. The ability to make the irrational rational, that is, to re-shape the limits of acceptable academic enquiry, is dependent on the accrual of both material and cultural capital, as Thompson's Rubbish Theory indicates. This is why some nineteenth-century ephemera collectors eventually saw their accumulations enter prestigious university libraries, while others appear in history only as cases studies of pathology in William James's *Principles of Psychology*. These issues have far-reaching impact when we consider that our contemporary understanding and treatment of hoarding behaviour is built on the legacy of Victorian ideas about collecting. Thus this

⁸ Jane Bennett, *Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter*, online video recording of a lecture delivered at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, New York, 13 September 2011. Vimeo <<https://vimeo.com/29535247>> [accessed 23 May 2014].

⁹ Ibid.

research's analysis of the popular journalistic, fictional and medical discourses around the confluence of miserliness and collecting contributes to work in political economy and cultural history which helps to frame hoarding as a cultural phenomenon rather than as a psychopathology. It both demonstrates that traditional materialist critique still has an important role to play in the study of historical collecting and lays the groundwork for the subjection of this particular psychopathology to class-based analysis. As Susan Pearce asserts, "[u]nacceptable' collectors...are making important assertions about the 'ordinary' material world and our relationship to it, which we ignore to our detriment.'¹⁰

Similar dynamics are at work when we think about women's collecting practices, which this thesis briefly touched upon in chapter five. In Victorian Britain, domestic assemblages were only theorized as collections when they used the modes of display associated with museum culture – women's recipe books, wardrobes, souvenirs and scrapbooks consequently do not feature in our discussions of collecting, although all might well stake a claim to that category. Most historical studies of collecting practices have been conducted through the lens of museum or gallery history, taking as their subject large, publicly-accessible collections. However, my research contributes to work such as Fiona Candlin's *Micromuseology* that seeks to recognise the limits of this approach and to focus instead on accumulative practices which subvert the ideals of value and display that were moulded in the Victorian museum age. By interrogating the idea of 'the collection' itself, my research highlights practices and practitioners that have not historically laid claim to that label. Its explorations of the legacy of the nineteenth century in the ways that we think about collections and collecting suggests that we should look outside of self-identified collections in order to understand the many guises and practices of collecting itself. This could have museological implications in terms of the devices and frames which we use to present objects for display in the public domain; the Cuming Museum's most recent displays

¹⁰ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 196.

contained only one item belonging to Ann Bagwill Cuming, daughter of Richard and sister to Henry Syer. How might the inclusion of Anne's possessions impact on the framing of the family's activities as a set of material practices?

Clearly, the Cuming museum archives hold much potential for further research. This thesis has contributed to work on the history of collecting and antiquarian culture in Victorian Britain by examining the collections and writings of the family and has opened up several new lines of enquiry into the collection by placing its objects and systems into wider contexts. Collectively, the objects held by the museum are of great significance as a record of how the family corresponded, conducted their researches, acquired objects, and negotiated their identity as amateur collectors in the increasingly professionalised landscape of Victorian antiquarianism. As an assemblage, a partially-documented material archive, and an extensive depository of personal correspondence, the collection offers much scope for further research into how the collecting practices of gentlemen of private means in Victorian London were materially possible and imaginatively constructed.

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